Petronius : protest or sensationalism?

Thesis

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis examines the questions surrounding the Roman novelist Petronius and his work. Scholarship has differed over his aims: ranging from an attack on the moral standards of the day to being purely for entertainment. The introduction explores some of these, along with the basic details of Petronius' life, and sets out the basis for the thesis.

Much of Petronius' work seems affected by *dissimulatio*: the necessity to hide one's true aims and feelings in the time of Nero. The historical, social and political background of that situation is examined; particularly with regard to Petronius' possible relationship with the emperor and with society as a whole, and his protest thereat - both direct and indirect, serious and amusing.

Then the literary background to the novel is examined, especially with regard to Petronius' possible relationship with, and protest at his literary contemporaries, Seneca the Younger and Lucan; along with the alleged educational and literary decline of that age. Petronius' place in the field of Roman satire is also explored.

The historical and social background of the sensationalist nature of much of Petronius' work is next considered, mainly with regard to public entertainment. Its effect on other writers is noted along with its possible effect on Petronius and his audience. Consideration is given to the possible nature and extent of that audience.

Special attention is paid to the effect of the theatre on Petronius' work. The mime is closely studied because of its marked effect on the content and nature of the work.

The conclusion examines the problems that the above raises and summarises commentators' solutions to them. The final section balances the evidence and concludes that, while Petronius was a protester and, to a greater extent, a sensationalist, he was primarily an entertainer.

DECLARATION

I confirm that the following thesis is my own work, and is a record of research done by myself alone; that it has not previously been submitted for any degree; and that no part of it has been published.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Classical authors are from the *Loeb or Penguin* editions, with minor changes to secure uniformity in spelling, punctuation etc.

2. [*--] indicates a numbered endnote relevant to the passage.

3. Unattributed references are to Petronius' *Satyricon*.

CONTENTS

PETRONIUS - PROTEST OR SENSATIONALISM?

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to consider whether the work of Petronius was one of protest or one of creating sensation in order to attract people's attention to his writings. One of the factors which will influence the discussion will be the audience for whom Petronius was writing - particularly its nature and extent; and also the tone in which he addresses it.

However, certain other matters have to be addressed now. Firstly, as to the title of the work; while some commentators, possibly correctly, refer to it as the *Satyrica*, I shall use the traditional title of the *Satyricon*.

As to the identity of the author, Rose's arguments on the date and authorship of the *Satyricon* (1962 and 1971) seem acceptable to virtually all modern scholars. Petronius was the Petronius Arbiter who was mentioned in Tacitus, *Annals*, XVI.18 as having committed suicide after falling foul of Nero in 66 AD, in the aftermath of the failure of the Pisonian conspiracy against the emperor. He had been a member of Nero's court and his *arbiter elegantiae*, after serving in a political career. It is, however, just possible that the author of the *Satyricon* was other than the above Petronius Arbiter; and that caveat must always be borne in mind.

Many commentators try to tie down the date of the composition of the *Satyricon* to the period 61-66, and

quote certain references in the extant portion to prove this. This may indeed be true of the extant sections. However, it would seem that these come from Books Fourteen to Sixteen of the *Satyricon*. This therefore indicates a very long work. Moreover, we cannot be sure if the extant portion is near the end of the work; or indeed if it was ever finished. At any rate it would be much longer than nearly all known novels; considerably longer than James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: works with which the *Satyricon* has often been compared, and which I shall look at from time to time. These works took up to a decade to complete, and I suggest that the *Satyricon* could hardly have taken less, even if Petronius did compose quickly; certainly he did not have the benefits of modern technology to aid him. Moreover, if indeed he spent his days sleeping and his nights in work and riotous living, and was noted for his laziness, as Tacitus suggests, his time for literary composition would have been considerably restricted. Composition possibly started about 55; i.e. soon after the start of Nero's reign. Thus I believe that the *Satyricon* was composed in the decade or so before 66.

As to the place of composition, it seems likely that it would be largely composed in Rome, where Petronius would usually be based, in close proximity to the court. Obviously he was familiar with the rest of Italy and its Greek cities, and may well have had a base there. His sojourn in Bithynia would also have given him some

knowledge of Asia. While the scene in the *Satyricon* varies, Rose (1962 [1],404-405) may be right in siting the main extant section, including the *Cena Trimalchionis*, in Puteoli; though obviously the length of the work lost might suggest other main sites. This siting of the action away from Rome may have been a deliberate ploy to prevent notables in Rome seeing themselves as being caricatured in the work.

Even so, it follows that Petronius would be acquainted with the leading personalities of the Rome of his day, certainly in the political, and probably the literary spheres; and so with the likes of Seneca and Lucan and their works; particularly relevant among the latter being Seneca's tragedies, and the earlier books at least of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. The latter, probably incorrect, title will be used in this thesis to avoid confusion with the poem in *Satyricon* 119ff. which is usually also referred to as *de Bello Civili* or *Bellum Civile*.

I must now discuss what I mean by 'protest' and 'sensationalism' in this thesis. 'Protest' I consider to be a speaking out against the faults and crimes that may have been apparent in Petronius' day. These could be in government, society, literature and morals. Some of these were of course interconnected, and some involved other factors; as will be more comprehensively detailed in Sections 2 and 3.

'Sensationalism' covers a wider area. In the *Satyricon* it could include the use of striking or

hyperbolic language. There are occasions when this could be regarded as expected, or even necessary in the context, but there are times when such language seems to be used for other effect. More importantly, I shall also look at what seem over lengthy or detailed or gratuitous descriptions of violence and/or bloodshed; of lust, particularly of a sexual nature; of the bizarre and unusual, particularly with regard to people and objects. In short, 'sensationalism' will include many of the things which certain sections of the modern mass media seem to interest themselves in, presumably for the delectation of their readers or audience; and which bring complaints of 'gratuitous offence' before the Press Council and the Broadcasting Standards Commission. Again in some such instances there may seem good reason for the author using sensationalism. However, I shall have occasion to examine its apparently excessive use, and possible reasons for that. In these respects the possible attitudes of, and reception by Petronius' 'target' audience will also form a facet of my discussion.

What was Petronius trying to achieve, particularly with regard to his effect on his audience? What methods did he employ to achieve his aims? These questions have divided scholars for many years, and nothing like unanimity among them has been achieved. Even the genre of the work is under dispute. Smith (1975,xv) mentions parodies of Greek romances, Milesian tales, parodies of epic, especially the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, low farce

with simple plot, Menippean and Lucilian satire and other factors as being ingredients. He sums up (xviii): 'All these genres seem to have shaped Petronius' novel, but his skill in combining them has not been properly recognised. Any attempt to find one single unifying link is misplaced. If we had the entire novel, we might find that the plot is less important than a series of diverse scenes.... If this hypothesis is sound, the *Satyricon* could be seen as satire in the Roman sense, a mixture of diverse elements.' Perhaps Conte's (1996) chapter heading is worth quoting: 'The Quest for a Genre (or chasing Will o' the Wisps?)'!

As to the purpose of the work, Panayotakis (1995,xx) notes that there are two main theories which have been formed to answer that question. 'One supports the notion that it was composed as literary entertainment, and the other favours the more serious interpretation of moral preaching.... The surviving *Satyrica* .... should be regarded as a sophisticated synthesis of many different literary genres.'

I have quoted the above comments at length because they sum up the problems which have faced Petronian scholars. Some have tried to make the whole work satirical, and therefore attacking the persons and manners of the day; while Rudich sees a unifying political link; and Panayotakis and N. Slater see a continuous theatrical background.

One should also perhaps note Johnson's remark on Joyce's work (1993,xiii): '*Ulysses* looked like a novel,

but it also looked like a drama, or catechism, or poetry, or music, depending on which page one happened to open.' I suspect that Petronius' similarity to Joyce in some of those aspects may have tempted scholars to look only at the pages reflecting their views. In addition, Smith's words, 'If we had the entire novel,' ought to have an effect on commentators' judgements.

Laird (1999,258) sees the *Satyricon* as very much bound up with matters of ideology and taste: Encolpius, Trimalchio and Eumolpus are all characters 'preoccupied in different ways with ideas of refinement;' the primary function of whose words is to 'characterize the speakers.' Again, while matters of taste do play a part in the *Satyricon,* I feel that Laird's comments on the characters are correct; their remarks on taste are part of the personalities of the narrator, of Trimalchio and his friends, and of Eumolpus. However, matters of taste are not all pervasive in the extant work. Also Laird introduces the caveat that the study of that work 'can point out the beams in our eyes, which can still impede our view of ancient literature as a whole.' Certainly some commentators see only what they want to see; and seem able to see it even in those portions of the work which remain lost.

Courtney (2001,2) notes two problems and their possible solutions: an author 'may on the surface pretend to adopt current cultural values while through irony he seeks to undermine them. My own experience is that

authors have usually left enough indications to testify to their irony, and that when scholars assume irony in the absence of plain signals, they are generally wrong to do so.' Also the author 'may be striking out in a new direction, setting for himself norms independent of any pre-existing tradition and therefore not appealing to any preconditioned response in the reader.' Certainly the *Satyricon* draws on previous literature, and some at least of Petronius' readers will have been acquainted with that; and of course with their own 'cultural values'. It is difficult to estimate how much of the *Satyricon* would have been a new experience to them, as so much has been lost, both of that work and ancient literature as a whole. It may well be, as I shall discuss later, that Petronius' contemporary readers, and all those who followed later, found at least something new or interesting or entertaining in his work.

Arrowsmith (1966,304) claims that the *Satyricon* is a book obsessed with luxury, and death. Thus it is 'a fundamentally serious, even moral work, a sophisticated Epicurean satire.' It is difficult to take this very far, and one is inclined to agree with Sullivan (1985 [1],1684) when he says that taste, style and wit 'are Petronius' positives, not morality and philosophy;' though the latter are not absent from the work. The same view is taken by Walsh in 'Was Petronius a Moralist?' (1974).

Richlin (1983,192) believes that the *Satyricon* is a mock epic in prose, and cites various incidents which

parallel ones in the *Odyssey*. Petronius did not use this parody 'in a consistent or allegorical way, but rather expressing .... his characters' vitiation of the ideals of epic.' McDermott (1983,82) also asserts that the *Satyricon* is a parody of the *Odyssey* in particular, and of ancient romances in general, again basing that on the many allusions to the *Odyssey* in the work. Phillips (1959,53-66) makes the point that the character of Odysseus had appeared many times on the Greek comic stage. He still retained his Homeric character; and 'his cleverness and cunning, his odd adventures, his familiarity with all kinds of people, his ready tongue and many disguises, and the strain of rascality in him' all combined to make him a suitable character for comedy. I would indeed note that many of the above attributes could be applied to Encolpius and his adventures, while pointing out that Encolpius is a less worthy figure than even a 'comic' Odysseus.

Callebat (1998,42) notes the themes of fortune and flight in the *Satyricon*. Fortune appears almost thirty times - most notable in 13,1: 101,1; 125,2 - and is the mark of adventurers such as Odysseus was. It also aids Encolpius' flight at the end of the *Cena;* but, as Callebat points out (43) he is fleeing not divine agencies, but 'very human ones'.

Certainly there are many allusions to the *Odyssey* in Petronius' work. In some ways that is not surprising in a work like the *Satyricon*, which has many allusions to

literature and history. Whether it amounts to parody is another matter. McDermott also makes much of the claim that Priapus dominates the action of the *Satyricon* in general, and of Encolpius in particular, in the same way that Poseidon's harrying of Odysseus dominates the *Odyssey*. However, such overwhelming domination in the *Satyricon* is by no means clear to me; a view backed up by Baldwin (1973,294-295), who persuasively plays down the Priapus factor in the plot of the *Satyricon*. Pointing out that Klebs - in *Philologus*, 1888,633-635 - had been the first to note a relationship between the *Satyricon* and the *Odyssey*, Killeen (1957,193) then demonstrates parallels between the *Satyricon* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. While there are indeed parallels between the *Odyssey* and the *Satyricon*, and possible ones between the latter and *Ulysses*, and between *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*, it would be unwise to make too much of all this. Any episodic work like the *Satyricon* and *Ulysses* is always liable to be seen as having parallels with the *Odyssey*, a very early and famous episodic work. Petronius and Joyce were both perfectly familiar with the *Odyssey*, and their works are such that parallels among them would not be unexpected.

Indeed Schmeling, in 'Latin Fiction' (1999,30) plays down Petronius' interest in parody and satire, while making prominent his experimentation with previous literary forms; hence the creation of 'something novel.' Other commentators have yet other views, some of which I shall examine later.

It must be emphasised, however, that these theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive; all could perfectly well have a part to play in the work as a whole. That one or other of them provides the sole or main theme for the *Satyricon* is something which I think tends to break down. As N. Slater says (1990,141), the fact that so many texts or genres are alluded to suggests that no one of them forms a 'hidden armature.'

The problems that confront Petronian scholars are well summed up by Bodel (1994,237-238). He notes the two divergent views of Petronius: that he was a moralist attacking contemporary vices; or that he was offering pure entertainment. He finds part of the solution in N. Slater's work (1990). Bodel stresses 'the concept of the repertoire, the package of literary and cultural knowledge that any reader brings to a text.' When it comes to our repertoire, 'we modern readers must inevitably feel that we are travelling uncomfortably light.... If we are to replicate the responses Petronius meant to elicit in his original readers, we must learn to distinguish the social realities he faithfully mirrors from the cultural conditions he purposefully distorts.' I shall try to consider and explain such factors, by examining the social, political and literary background against which Petronius wrote, and the effects he may have intended among a wider and/or later readership.

There is one further matter which requires consideration at this point. I think it can be agreed

that at various points in his work Petronius is making overt or covert attack on certain facets of life in his day. One says 'Petronius', but must always be aware of equating the opinions expressed by one or other of the characters in the work with the author's own particular opinions. Sullivan (1968 [1],210) sums it up: 'The conclusion seems hard to resist that the overtly moralising passages in the *Satyricon*, suspect as they might be anyway in their humorous setting, ... are there for literary rather than didactic purposes.' It is of course tempting for critics to hope that these reflect Petronius' own inner convictions, and represent his repugnance at the luxury and corruption of his age. 'Although we cannot say that Petronius did *not* hold these views, we cannot infer that he did from the *Satyricon*.' As Callebat (1998,71) says: 'The difficulties met by a modern critic in identifying a "moral" in Petronius .... are undoubtedly tied in with the non-engagement of the author.' One notes too that Umbricius in Juvenal III gives views on all kinds of matters in contemporary Rome, yet it is not always possible to say that they are Juvenal's own.

F. Jones notes the parallels between Petronius and Juvenal (2001,127), and draws attention to the frequent use of *clamo* to show how Petronius' heroes 'live' a life which, however bizarre in itself, is the more so because of their constant self-dramatisation. Jones points out the problem of dealing with the position set out by George

(1966): the first person in the *Satyricon* is 'an amalgam of two distinct elements, the voice of the author, elegant and refined, and the voice of an Encolpius who is no wiser than the Encolpius in the story.' That is probably true, but I suspect that, as in most amalgams, it is not always possible, or even desirable, to separate the various constituents once fused.

Note too that Dalby (2000,10) sees 119,1-7 as similar to the views of Petronius' near contemporary Pliny the Elder, who often reminds his readers that Nature is generous, 'and that humans are greedy and wasteful, modern Romans more than any before them;' for instance in *N.H.*, XXXVI,1-8.

Schmeling (1999,34) feels that 'The voice of the *Satyricon* is always that of Encolpius, but is so unreliable .... that we are bound to treat the whole work with caution.' Bagnani indeed takes such views further (1956,24): 'How any commentator can suppose that the views expressed by so repulsive a young man [Encolpius] are those of the author himself passes my understanding.' He is right to note Encolpius' spinelessness, querulousness and wide interest in sex, but that does not prevent the author putting his views into Encolpius' mouth, or that of any other character for that matter, if ever he saw fit. Kragelund indeed takes the view that Petronius' installation of Encolpius as the narrator 'complicates the precise delineation of his personal stand.... The *Satyricon* does not at all come across as a

work intended to carry a "message"' (1989,449). George (1966,351) also makes a valid point: that Encolpius considers himself as a more positive character than he is: 'a second Odysseus, crafty and virile, suffering and overcoming misfortunes that would cripple lesser men.' Thus Encolpius' character may reflect the *dissimulatio* in the work, of which I shall have more to say. So, however much Petronius may have had in common with Encolpius, 'he would not wish to identify with him *in toto*, as an effeminate without even the redeeming quality of subtlety.' Sullivan (1968 [1],159) expresses a similar opinion.

Thus I would tend to agree with Sullivan, Schmeling, Kragelund and George, though I feel that Schmeling is being perhaps too wary. For instance the outburst of feeling from Encolpius in 78 - *ibat res ad summam nauseam* - and the address to the *Catones* in 132 seem so heartfelt that Petronius may have been injecting more of himself into the character. Significantly these are passages to which I shall return; though again the very significant passages are probably too few to draw any firm conclusions. Conte, however, is one who would make more of Encolpius being the voice of Petronius; and such views should not be discounted. [*1]

It would seem then that Petronius has fairly successfully submerged himself and his views in the work. Various opinions are indeed expressed in it. Whether they are Petronius' own is to some extent irrelevant to my

argument. The fact remains that they *were* expressed; and it is for me to make what I can of them.

2. PETRONIUS AS A PROTESTER - Historical Background

a) A Life of Fear

If one accepts that the author of the *Satyricon* was the Petronius Arbiter of Nero's court, that immediately sets limits on the field of protest. Whatever the atmosphere at court, Petronius could hardly indulge in open dissent towards Nero or the imperial form of government, or openly criticise any of the powerful men around him, without risking trouble. Possibly he could indulge in some form of covert protest; which may be a thread in the *dissimulatio* that can be discerned in the work; and here I must deal with that term as it applied to life in Nero's reign.

Rudich (1993,xiii) defines *dissimulatio* as applied to life then as 'a complex and contradictory state of mind within one and the same person, a result of conflicting forces - intellectual, emotional and instinctive. Pertaining to both ideas and emotions, *dissimulatio* operated on the conscious level, but also if it became habitual on the subconscious.' Though Rudich is applying that to life in general under Nero, the definition could certainly apply to Petronius and his work, as shall be seen time and again. Much of Rudich's work concerns *dissimulatio* in life and politics under Nero, and indeed other emperors. [*2]

There could also be a conflict between an individual's *dissimulatio* and public *existimatio* in that same person. Indeed Petronius may have felt that conflict from time to

time: for instance in fulfilling the expectations of his potential audience without offending anyone in power. Rudich (xxiii) indeed claims that the condition was recognised, but that it was unwise to comment on it. He notes Dio Cassius (LIX,18,5) on Titius Rufus, who in 39 AD 'was charged with having declared that the Senate thought one way and voted the other,' and who committed suicide before being brought to trial. Such alleged hypocrisy in ruling bodies is indeed not uncommon; but the incident does illustrate the difficulty and danger of political dissidence under certain emperors.

Thus Petronius had to be careful about what or whom he criticised openly, without doubt as to his target. Of course 'the government' has probably been the main target for mass and individual criticism from earliest times to the present, and Petronius too has thoughts in that field. He indeed has his characters comment on local government's failings. However, the national government of the day was, in effect, Nero. That emperor may or may not have been tolerant of criticism, but he could hardly have tolerated a blatant attack on himself by one of his courtiers: especially the one whom he had appointed his *arbiter elegantiae*.

Rudich (1997,250) is of the opinion that Petronius' position at Nero's court was precarious, as his 'wit, talent and sophistication' were bound in time to excite Nero's jealousy. That may be true, but it should be remembered that the *Satyricon* must have taken, under any

circumstances, a fair time to compose and publish; certainly long enough to attract Nero's interest. However, there is no reason to believe that Nero showed any hostility towards Petronius until the final crisis. It could be that Petronius simply kept his thoughts, and manuscript, to himself. What then was his point in writing? Or that it was read to a very close circle only, from which Nero would definitely be excluded. However, I suspect that any reading of the work to others would probably have led to its contents being divulged to Nero sooner or later, even if he had been excluded from the readings. One may also query the exact extent and importance of the post of *arbiter elegantiae*. It possibly did not entitle its holder to be among the first rank of courtiers. Nevertheless, if that holder did engage in public, or even private literary activity, then such would almost certainly be of interest to the emperor.

Rankin (1971,38) notes that Nero's artistic activities were protected from criticism with great care. Frankness was impossible even among the intellectuals and writers at court. 'Apparent frankness could never be genuine, and must never be mistaken as such.... Unless the *Satyricon* was kept a strict secret from Nero (which is unlikely on a variety of grounds), it cannot have represented in a recognizable form Petronius' true feelings about the Emperor.' Rankin elaborates on that in his note 34; and, while certainty is impossible, I feel something like that must have been the case.

As open criticism of Nero would probably have serious repercussions, any attack on him would have to be less than obvious; so subtle in fact that Petronius could deny it by clever talking, if questioned about it. That of course would involve a form of *dissimulatio*. Rudich (1997,254) points out that the *dissimulatio* was to be revealed at the end of Petronius' life, when even his will deviated from the usual deathbed flatteries of Nero. Tacitus (*Annals*, XVI,19) tells us that Petronius listed Nero's sensualities, with the names of each male and female bedfellow and the like, and sent the list to Nero. Nero seems to have been surprised at this, which could mean that he had little contact with Petronius, or that the latter had successfully concealed his real feelings during his dealings with Nero.

Tacitus' account of Petronius is a brief one, considering that he had at least some importance at court. Likewise one might have thought that Petronius' position and apparent lifestyle would have attracted the attention of Suetonius. He, however, makes no mention of Petronius. Yet it would be unwise to assert from this that Petronius' importance has been overestimated by commentators who may have put too much reliance on Tacitus' account. It may be that he was a less influential figure at court, and that he and Nero had less to do with each other than has generally been assumed, but certainty is impossible.

Tacitus makes no mention of Petronius' writings. Actually he makes little mention of Lucan's either, or of

Seneca's. Bagnani (1954,25) makes the point that, while Tacitus devotes two chapters to Petronius, he devotes only one to Lucan; and that, since Petronius was not one of the more important political figures of the time, Tacitus' interest in him must be for another reason: 'That reason can only be literary.' Bagnani may have a point here.

Moreover, Tacitus seems to make much of an author's writings only when they contributed materially to that author's downfall, as in the case of Cremutius Cordus (*Annals*, IV,34-35), and of Herennius Seneca and Junius Rusticus (*Agricola*, 2). While too much should not be read into this, it may be a pointer that Petronius' writings were not seen as seditious; and that, if he did criticise Nero and others, his *dissimulatio* was effective.

Nero's attitude towards those who would deride or criticise him is unclear. For instance Suetonius (*Nero*, 39) remarks 'how amazingly tolerant Nero seemed to be of the insults that everyone cast at him;' and he goes on to list examples of such. Yet in 62 Nero allowed the revival of the *lex maiestatis*, suspended by Claudius, for defamation of the emperor. Sullivan (1985,154) finds little evidence of punishment for those who wrote lampoons of Nero up to 65. However, I would note that some were written in far off Spain and Gaul, while others were chalked up anonymously on walls in Rome. Consequently their writers were hardly at risk. Anyone openly writing libellous literature against the emperor in Rome was probably running the risk of prosecution or worse.

Sullivan (161) makes the point that Petronius was much at home in Nero's court until the last, and that 'the combination of his humorous saga of funny, obscure and vulgar elements with elevated literary criticism' would appeal to an emperor who took an interest in such things. That may be true, as long as the emperor was not forced to see himself as one of the more disreputable characters in the work. Petronius seems to have stopped just short of that. Also the fact that the *Satyricon* dealt with 'funny, obscure and vulgar elements', apart from appealing to Nero's interest in such, may have helped in making Petronius' readers think that his tale could have little to do with refined and important people at court.

Even so, there was a risk that any unguarded remark could get one into trouble. However, 'with the end of free political activity only the games were left as a place where popular enthusiasms and grievances could be aired without counting as civil disorder' (Griffin, 1984,210). Tacitus (*Histories*, I,72; *Annals*, VI,12) and Cicero (*pro Sestio*, 106) make it clear that the theatre was also a location for such demonstrations; and much of Petronius' work seems to have been connected with the theatre. Thus the world of entertainment, which could also include some forms of literature, was seemingly an area where one could court popular feeling and give voice to it without causing imperial offence. Much as he might wish to do so, an emperor could not obliterate a large number of protesters at a show. If one stood out as an

individual, rather than protested with the crowd, then the risk was very much there, and *dissimulatio* in protest very much necessary.

Moreover such popular protests were usually about current perceived grievances and not about any lack of personal or political freedom. Therefore it was in the emperor's interest to keep the people happy. In this connection Yavetz (1988,128-129) notes that under Nero the Romans enjoyed *securitas*. However, that was not the sole reason why he remained loved by the *plebs sordida* after his death. The patricians had been somewhat protected by earlier emperors, but Nero had allowed, or forced knights and senators to make exhibitions of themselves in the arena or theatre (Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV,14; Suetonius, *Nero*, 11-12); and even took part himself. Yavetz notes: 'If it is possible to speak of *levitas popularis* in connection with the emperors of Rome, it reached its zenith under Nero.' For he did all he could to gain the goodwill of the people, while hurting, 'at times unnecessarily', the feelings of the upper classes. He notes too that, when Nero wanted to leave Rome for a tour, it displeased the people who saw him as their source of *securitas*, not only against the upper classes but against criminals. It was this sympathy with the masses that made him popular with them: 'He had seen the dejected looks of his countrymen; he could hear their whispered complaints' (Tacitus, *Annals*, XV,38). Even after Piso's conspiracy, Nero's popularity recovered, and on his return from Achaea

in 68 the people greeted him enthusiastically. Thus one gets a picture of an emperor doing everything possible to gain the favour of one sector of the population, while doing his best to cow or humiliate another. The division was probably not as clear cut as that, however. There would no doubt be plebeians who disliked Nero for one reason or another, and some patricians who got on well enough with him. Certainly some of the latter seem to have gone along willingly enough with Nero's ideas for amusing the plebs. We do not know if Petronius was one of them.

It must be pointed out that we know very little about the feelings of the plebs in Rome. Rudich (1993,xxiv) notes that it seems that 'the mutual rancour [between the classes] .... had by no means vanished,' but it is difficult to say much beyond that. Yavetz (1988,114-116) says much the same. Certainly the emperors' *panem et circenses* policy seems to have found favour with the man in the street; and it was the failure in the corn dole or the provision of acceptable shows that tended to raise his ire; witness the comments of Trimalchio's freedmen guests on this (44-45). General politics and political intrigues may have passed him by.

Certainly Tacitus and Suetonius give a frightening picture of Nero's behaviour towards the patricians, many of whom seem to have felt that they had to flatter him at all costs. That is perhaps best shown in their reception of the news of Nero's removal of his mother, Agrippina

(Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV,12-14); Suetonius, *Nero*, 34). Tacitus notes: 'It had been the custom of Publius Clodius Thrasea Paetus to pass over flatteries in silence or curt agreement. But this time he walked out of the senate - thereby endangering himself without bringing general freedom any nearer.' Though Thrasea had some support, it fell away and he was eventually forced into suicide.

Yet in 62, the praetor Antistius wrote poems lampooning Nero. At the subsequent senate debate it was moved that he be deposed and executed. Tacitus (*Annals*, XIV,48) comments that, while there was general agreement, 'Thrasea, after complimenting Nero and blaming Antistius, argued that under so excellent an emperor the senate was liable to no compulsion, and need not inflict the maximum punishment deserved.' Thrasea's proposal of clemency was carried, so there were those who were willing at times to defy Nero. One must express surpise at a praetor openly lampooning Nero. He seems to have got away with it here, but it must have been seen as a warning to others. Also the fact that Thrasea felt that he had to flatter Nero on this occasion demonstrates that *dissimulatio* was a definite asset at times. Perhaps too he felt that he could encourage Nero thus to be an example of the Stoic ideal of a 'good' ruler. While Thrasea probably felt that he had to save Antistius by any possible means, it is illustrative of the situations in which the senatorial class found itself at this time. Moreover the senate did not often defy Nero, or side with Thrasea, as this alleged

quote from the latter shows (Dio Cassius, LXII,15,3): 'If I were the only one that Nero was going to put to death, I could easily pardon those who load him with flatteries. But even among those who praise him to excess there are many whom he has already disposed of or will yet destroy.'

Whether or not Thrasea actually said that, it is indicative of the times in which he lived. Anyone making himself conspicuous for any reason was liable to suspicion. A writer like Petronius, who was at court and who displayed literary merit, and who offered at least arguable criticism of the emperor, must have been taking risks, and therefore *dissimulatio* must have been necessary to minimise them. That may help explain his use of comedy and low life, which he could pretend was not to be taken seriously. In the end, however, he may have been like others who met their death 'not because they were accused of conspiracy, but because they were what they were.' Rudich (1993,153) points out that Tacitus' description of Petronius' death was an exemplary description of *dissimulatio* at work. He also notes (xxxiii-xxxiv) that the three authors on which Tacitus drew for his description of Nero's reign - Cluvius Rufus, Fabius Rusticus and Pliny the Elder - all showed dissident traits and all practised *dissimulatio*.

However, whatever dissidence they may have felt, without the army on their side the patricians really had little chance of getting rid of Nero; Piso's conspiracy ended in miserable failure. They simply had to put up

with him as best they could. One must suspect therefore that for much of the time they had to conceal their real feelings. It was that *dissimulatio* which formed part of the lives of many, including probably Petronius, and which was to be reflected in his writings.

b) A Life of *dissimulatio*

There are those such as Arrowsmith (1966) who think that, because of the attacks made in the *Satyricon* on various features of life in Rome, the work was a deep analysis of the 'death throes of classic *Romanitas*'. Walsh (1974,184) generally rejects that hypothesis on the grounds of the known character of Petronius; the absence of any moral point of reference in the story; and Petronius' almost constant connection of his work with the world of the mime. Certainly all these add to the doubts about the *Satyricon* being a moralising diatribe, despite its apparent attacks on various contemporary groups.

Walsh also notes the various literary points of reference in the work: 'There are evocations .... of .... oratory, historiography, epic, tragedy, satire, elegy, mime - constantly providing a second, more intellectual level of entertainment beyond the narrative of low, lubricious adventure.' I think it is worth stressing here that Petronius' writing seems to be on two levels. On the protest side one can see the obvious stated targets, but a more perceptive reader can see others, if so minded. It seems to be part of Petronius' *dissimulatio*. That perhaps lies in two areas: pretending to attack, when possibly not doing so; and apparently aiming the work at a highly literate, restricted audience, when in fact it can be enjoyed by anyone.

I think that Petronius did make overt and covert hits at society's faults, but not often enough, at least in the

extant portion of the work, to say that they are his constant underlying target. I am inclined therefore to agree with N. Slater (1988,174) that moralism and realism are an 'unsatisfactory' description of Petronius' goals, and that he takes a more 'creative and imaginative' approach. His satire seems as much aimed at the ability of individuals to read their companions and their environment, as it is at any human or institutional target. I shall examine possible targets shortly, but for now will point to Slater's summing up of Petronius' aims: 'He throws down a sharp challenge then: to achieve what none of his characters achieves, an interpretation of the world of the *Satyricon*.'

There was indeed little attempt to mask the criticism of the targets that were common enough in Petronius' day, and in other ages. However, there may have been other, less visible targets. These are not general targets, but particular ones, though ones still within the areas of general criticism. For instance, in the field of contemporary manners and morals, Petronius, while criticising the ostentation, behaviour etc. of the wealthy freedmen of his day, may also have been targetting the morals and behaviour of the contemporary court, perhaps even of Nero himself. Also, within his general criticism of contemporary education and the alleged comcomitant decline in literary standards, Petronius may have been criticising exponents of that literature, such as Seneca the Younger and Lucan.

That approach is fraught with problems. Commentators have made lists of apparently critical references to Nero, Lucan and others in the *Satyricon*, and I shall look at some of these. Much has been made of Petronius' possible use of parody with regard to both the behaviour and writing of the men of his time. The point I must make is this: if one is parodying another's behaviour or writings, it should be obvious to a reasonably intelligent or knowledgeable reader who or what is being parodied. If there has to be considerable debate among scholars whether, say, Petronius is parodying anyone and, if so, whom, then two conclusions can perhaps be drawn: either that he is not much good as a parodist; or that he is not engaged in parody as such.

It is true that modern commentators may be distant in time from the issues and personalities concerned; but much is known about the main persons who are being dealt with. It is difficult to see that Petronius produced an out and out parody of their works. Also it must be borne in mind that, if the writings of other epicists and tragedians at that time were still available, then opinions might have to be revised as to whom or what, if anything, Petronius was attacking.

It is necessary now to examine what Petronius may indeed have written about Nero and his court. Sullivan (1968 [1],149) comments that, while some of the references to the imperial court may be accepted, they cannot be taken as evidence to back the theory that the *Cena* was a

direct attack on Nero, or any other emperor; 'Petronius was not sailing as close to the wind as all that.' Moreover, the various hits scored against Trimalchio just do not fit 'the luxurious and literate Nero.' Indeed he uses against Trimalchio 'certain characteristics of earlier emperors as well as such innovations in contemporary high society as he disapproved of.' [*3]

These points are well made. Indeed it is possible from a reading of the *Cena* to get the impression that it was attacking the amiable and bumbling Claudius and his retinue of freedmen rather than anyone else. Admittedly it would probably be fairly pointless making a strong attack on Claudius when he was almost certainly dead when the *Cena*, if not the *Satyricon* as a whole, was written. Juvenal I,170-171 makes the point that it is safest to satirise the dead. That may be so, but I do not think that making oblique references to a dead emperor would raise much interest in Petronius' audience. However, there may still be a hint about times past and about certain prevalent customs - notably the position of freedmen. [*4]

Walsh (1970,139) lists a number of correspondences with previous emperors, though I would not regard all as conclusive. Crum (1952,167) lists others including those with Nero; and compares Suetonius (*Claudius*, 32) on Claudius' breaking wind with Trimalchio in 47,4-7. He says, 'Only pedantry would see a parallel.' However, I would have thought that a considerably closer one than

some of the others that he does find convincing.

Certainly Walsh is more emphatic about references to Nero (138): '[They] seem too close and numerous to be coincidence. Trimalchio wears a golden bracelet on his arm as Nero did. The emperor also appeared with a napkin around his neck, as Trimalchio did.... Nero kept his first shaving hairs in a golden casket; Trimalchio has a *pyxis non pusilla, in qua barbam ipsius conditam esse dicebant*. In their slave retinues, both Nero and Trimalchio have bemedalled runners, ... and both have a slave called Carpus. In the course of the *Cena*, a singing acrobat falls from a ladder; a not dissimilar accident occurred to Nero in the arena.' Another instance which I feel worth noting is in 36 where Trimalchio has a claque of slaves, rather like Nero's claques for his theatrical performances.

If one takes each of these comparisons individually, it might seem totally inoffensive and/or coincidental. Many people must have worn gold bracelets, not just Nero and Trimalchio. Keeping the first scrapings of one's beard in some sort of container was a Roman custom. Nero's and Trimalchio's containers may have been on the ostentatious side, but they were probably not unique. Likewise the other individual examples may be explained away in one way or another. Crum (1952,161ff.) lists many other examples of a less striking nature, and these too can be explained away as generalisations or coincidence. To be fair to Walsh, he does make the point (138) that one

should not draw the wrong conclusions about the correspondences which he regards as reasonably established: 'Trimalchio is not a fictional representation of Nero. In his main lines he is an upstart old ignoramus who has made his way in the world of trade. Yet the comic detail of Nero's appearance and habits is incorporated to cause merriment to contemporaries close to the court. I conclude that Nero can hardly have been present at a recitation of the *Cena*.' It is of course impossible to confirm or deny Walsh's last remark. In any case it is probably irrelevant whether Nero was present or not. I again assert that it would not have been difficult for him to find out or be told what Petronius was writing about.

Certainly in general terms Nero was in no way like Trimalchio. He was not an old buffoon who had made his way in commerce. As noted above, the possible references could be explained away individually. However, I feel that the six or so reasonably convincing ones are perhaps too many to be mere coincidence. Rose (1966,295) would tend to support that.

Petronius may indeed have been playing to an audience who knew Nero and his ways, and who would see references to Nero in the *Cena*, if they were so inclined. If they were not, then little would have been lost in their appreciation of the work. Moreover, these references seem to have been confined to the *Cena*. That is believed to have been only a relatively small part of the work as a

whole, which we have very little basis for regarding as an attack on Nero; apart perhaps from the consideration that some of the sexual adventures described in the remaining extant portion may also have been part of Nero's repertoire. Even if Nero had been present at a *recitatio* of the *Cena*, Petronius may have felt confident enough about his position or powers of persuasion to make these references, and get away with it on the half dozen occasions that suspicion may have been aroused. If he could persuade Nero that the references might apply to anyone and/or were mere coincidence, then certainly he would have been bringing into play his powers of *dissimulatio*.

It may also be possible that Trimalchio was being portrayed as consciously aping Nero as a piece of flattery on his part; with any implied criticism on Petronius' part being of people who ape the great. This again may be part of the mimic and role playing background of the work as a whole.

It is also worth pointing out that, whether or not Petronius was guilty of criticising Nero, he was certainly not guilty of the *adulatio* of him which characterised so many of his contemporaries, and drew the ire of Tacitus (*Annals*, XIV,12 and 64; XV,74) and Seneca (*Nat. Quaest.*, 4 *Praef.*,9). In Petronius' extant work there is certainly no flattery of Nero. Rudich (1993,154) points out a quote from Plutarch (*Moralia*, 60d), who mentions 'that unscrupulous practice which had such a damaging effect on

silly people. This consists of accusing them of tendencies and weaknesses the very opposite of their real failings.... Titus Petronius did this with Nero.' Petronius possibly criticised Nero, but the criticisms or references seem to have been of a superficial nature - clothes, jewellery etc. - and apparently do not reach the heart of Nero's vices. What Petronius may have said in person to Nero is just not known, but presumably they did converse from time to time.

The question of Petronius' possible audience and what they may have taken from the work is a thorny one. In that respect Bartsch (1994,65) makes the point that it is only when an audience notes that 'a given speech or verse contains a meaning other than the one dictated (in public life) by political convention or (in literature) by the additional factors of fictional content and literary precedent that double speak is born.' Pliny the Younger (*Epistles*, I,5,5-7) says that such subversive comment may be deliberate, or may arise fortuitously from the audience's perception of some supposed statement of dissidence. Indeed Quintilian (IX,2,65-66) remarks on how audiences of his time listened out for such allusions in speeches whose surface meaning was apparently different. Bartsch (67) comments that identification by the audience of such an allusion is not a straightforward matter. Quintilian indeed was well aware that audiences could be overzealous in this matter, seeing allusions that were simply not there or intended (IX,2,78). Bartsch points

out that despotic rule, with its restrictions on freedom, was likely to spawn such audiences; and audiences who expect double meanings will see them whether they are there or not. I suspect indeed that that is what some modern commentators do with regard to Petronius' work, though I maintain that he was not above speaking to his audience on two levels: that which was straightforward, and that which was affected by *dissimulatio*. While Suetonius (*Nero*, 39) may have considered Nero tolerant of insults, the reality may have seemed less so to Petronius and his contemporaries.

Rudich looks closely at the matter of *dissimulatio* in regard to Petronius' possible relationship with Nero. His initial comment (1997,187) is: 'There hardly seems to exist a single passage that yields an unequivocal political message.' I agree that a straightforward reading would produce such a result; and with his note that this has unsurprisingly produced a varied response from scholars: 'from the claim that the figure of Trimalchio is an outright caricature of Nero to the belief that the book was designed for private recitation in the emperor's court.' I have already dismissed the former extreme and will deal with the latter elsewhere. I am inclined to concur with Rudich's view that there is no ground for believing that the Petronius portrayed by Tacitus 'was at any point the emperor's genuine friend' (189). Rudich justifies this by reference to the comments on Petronius in Plutarch (*Moralia*, 60a-e) and Pliny the

Elder (*N.H.*, XXXVII,2). 'Petronius behaves as an impostor - *he actually was not what he pretended to be.* A suspicion of the Arbiter's dissidence, however disguised, that arises from a reading of the *Satyricon* can thus be grounded in his biography' (190). He feels that Petronius' final actions were not last minute resentment in response to Nero's treachery, but a reflection of his whole experience as a politician and courtier.

The *Satyricon* itself does not seem to contradict that impression at any point. Again I must question Petronius' exact position or importance at court. At any rate Rudich is not surprised by the crucial role that 'the motif of imposture and dissimulation plays in the *Satyricon.* This is facilitated by Petronius' deliberate choice of subject - the adventures of confidence men.' Rankin (1971,39-50) lists many examples of secrecy and pretence in the work, notably the Quartilla incident, the *Cena*, the lovers' quarrel, and the disguises etc. on the voyage to, and stay at Croton. I would accept the above, and would add my earlier observation that such characters were possibly employed by Petronius to divert any suspicion that he might be attacking more important people; people who would not regard themselves as confidence tricksters, wastrels or sexual and social misfits.

It is indeed the case that the adventures described in the *Satyricon* involve much *dissimulatio;* the *Cena* is a prime example, as is the character of Eumolpus. Whether that can be tied in with *dissimulatio* in Petronius' own

lifestyle is another matter. However, Rudich has little doubt (191): 'It must be recognised that, since the principal characters .... are society's outcasts, they stand in need of accommodation to an often hostile reality, a predicament not dissimilar to that of the Neronian dissidents.... It may be inferred that, by the very choice of its subject matter, as well as the development of its plot, the *Satyricon* underscores the pervasiveness of *dissimulatio* of life under Nero;' tied in with its volatility and general insecurity.

I have quoted the above at length because it deals with two important points. There is much *dissimulatio* within the characters and plot of the *Satyricon;* it would be difficult to disagree with that to any extent. It is also true that life for certain sections of society in the later years of Nero's reign was not easy. The opening chapters of Tacitus' *Histories* and *Agricola* give some idea of the difficulties that writers laboured under up till the death of Nero, and indeed beyond. Also many were becoming disgusted at Nero's antics at the public shows, his alleged sexual adventures and his megalomania, suspicion and cruelty. Yet while his death delighted the senators, it brought gloom to the *plebs sordida et circo ac theatris sueta* (Tacitus, *Histories,* I,4). When Tacitus' anti-plebeian bias has been allowed for, it is still not surprising that plots against Nero were formed. Rudich comments that there were those such as Seneca and Persius who did try and salvage what was left of the *mos*

maiorum, but Petronius was influenced by his uncanny, if inarticulate, recognition of its imminent collapse; as can be seen in Tacitus' portrait of him and in the *Satyricon* itself. However, I would point out that we really do not know what Petronius thought of the *mos maiorum*, or whether he was unduly concerned about its imminent collapse.

Zeitlin too (1971 [2],631-680) makes much of Petronius' concern with the 'disintegration' in his world; which is reflected in his work's inconsistencies, ambiguities and incongruities. I would not go completely down that road, for a work with such a wide scope and apparently loose structure as the *Satyricon* was probably always going to incorporate these attributes to some extent anyway. Yet she makes a valid point: that in Rome at that time various factors encouraged a work like the *Satyricon*. For Nero imbued his courtiers with sophisticated tastes, but a contempt for convention. His paranoid fears may have created an atmosphere where the courtiers' world would have seemed chaotic and illusory. The political climate over some decades, and not just under Nero, had weakened the senatorial class, so that a sense of communal values was diminished. There was also a socio-economic factor, at the start of a time of physical and social mobility. This last is, I feel, represented in the talk and events of the *Cena*, particularly in 43-45.

Petronius, being apparently a man of the world, may well have seen that the *mos maiorum* was all but dead.

Certainly many of his characters had little respect for it. That, however, need not have made him any more likely to have been in favour of Nero's behaviour. Yet as Rudich points out (1993,89), none of the conspirators in 65 can really be assigned to the conservative 'moral opposition', such as Thrasea Paetus. It has been suggested, for instance by Warmington (1969,ch.2), that Stoicism may have motivated at least some of Nero's opponents. However, the *Satyricon* and Petronius' life story would seem to suggest that he would have been more inclined towards Epicureanism; for which see below. Certainly the members of Piso's conspiracy against Nero appear to have been a mixed lot. Lateranus and Vestitus are mentioned by Tacitus as having Republican sympathies. In his poetry Lucan expressed admiration for great Republican figures such as Pompey and Cato. Otherwise the conspirators seem to have been motivated largely by hatred of Nero and a desire to replace him as emperor; not by a desire for a return to the Republic and the *mos maiorum*. The conspiracy failed, and most of its members were either killed or forced into suicide. Even some like Seneca who were probably not involved paid the penalty. Petronius too does not seem to have been involved, but also died in the aftermath, when Nero was distinctly touchy about possible opposition, and willing to listen to Tigellinus when he produced evidence against Petronius. It would seem that it was this political reason that motivated Nero's action rather than any of Petronius' literary

activity. Petronius cannot have been completely divorced from politics; he had been a consul in 62, and proconsul in Bithynia. Consequently he could hardly have been unaware of what was going on in the political sphere, and of the dangers for him in it.

At court in Rome under Nero there must indeed have been intrigue and suspicion, and fear; both by the emperor towards his courtiers, and by them towards him. That Petronius was able to maintain his position in such an atmosphere would have required considerable ingenuity on his part. His expertise in 'the whole art of pleasure' aroused Tigellinus' jealousy; therefore it must also have been in danger of arousing Nero's. Petronius' undoubted literary skill must also have attracted the attention of an emperor who had a high opinion of his own skills in that field. Lucan in his epic apparently found it expedient to include an almost incredible eulogy of Nero near the start of his poem (I,33-66). True, his relations with Nero then were better than they became, but it is still an amazing passage. As the poem goes on Lucan's Republican sympathies do become apparent, and he feels constrained to write (IX,982): *invidia sacrae, Caesar, ne tangere famae.* Obviously Lucan too was feeling the strain of a situation where both his literary and political 'persona' had to be a matter of *dissimulatio*, that apparently desirable attribute of poets and politicians under Nero. Perhaps that is why Petronius treated both groups as being under attack by the public in general;

but in a typically humorous vein: the politicians in 44, and the poets, according to Eumolpus, in 83. If Petronius depicted such as laughable, then perhaps he felt that people would regard his own efforts in these fields as laughable; and thus he would be in less danger.

He may have had motivation for his attacks on the educational system and the literature it indirectly produced. Encolpius' attack in 2, although itself rhetorical in tone - perhaps an example of setting rhetoric to encompass its own downfall - still seems possibly genuine; as does Agamemnon's reply. Again Petronius may have felt safe in making such an attack. Even so, Encolpius and Agamemnon themselves hardly seem figures to be taken totally seriously.

The attacks on local politicians in 44, and 45 - for Norbanus was probably a magistrate - again may well reflect general feeling, and again are put in the mouths of 'lightweight' characters. The feeling may be genuine, but the expression of it is less than serious. Petronius may have had the motivation, but he had to be careful in his tone. He may of course have had that kind of personality. In 55 an apparently serious discussion about poets is suddenly interrupted by Trimalchio declaring, *quid putas inter Ciceronem et Publilium?* He then gives a comic apparent parody of the latter. The seemingly touching tale of the Widow of Ephesus is greeted with laughter and scorn (113), followed by a comic incident with Tryphaena. Of course Roman attitudes to such a tale

may have been different from modern ones, but it still seems an example of apparently setting up something serious, only to provoke amusement at it. Perhaps that was a reflection of Petronius' own situation where seriousness possibly had to be tempered with humour.

This is perhaps also shown in 78, where Trimalchio has formally read his will and is making arrangements for his funeral. All the solemn vocabulary of funerals is there: *stragulam .... ampullam nardi .... vinarium .... parentalia.* Yet Encolpius found the apparent solemnity all too sickening and ridiculous. The drunken Trimalchio asks them: *fingite me .... mortuum esse;* echoing the pretence so common in the work. Then he caps it with the even more inappropriate words to his brass band: *dicite aliquid belli.* The incident that ends the *Cena* episode then follows. Petronius may indeed have been attacking the freedmen and their influence, but he does it in such a way that the ridicule is the dominant force rather than the attack.

There is a strange parallel to Trimalchio's dinner in 141, where probably Eumolpus is speaking. Again there is pretence: 'Just shut your eyes and imagine....' There is also mention of wonderful dishes and exquisite sauces to disguise the flavour as there is in the *Cena.* There is rhetorical mention of notable events in Roman history: Saguntum, Petelia and Numantia, where people turned cannibal in their distress; but it all seems to be leading to Eumolpus getting his heirs to eat his dead

body.

The grand and the noble are again made subservient to ridicule, as in the 'throwaway' endings to: 'The people of Saguntum .... ate human flesh' - *nec hereditatem exspectabant.* 'The people of Petelia did likewise in the extremities of famine, and gained nothing by the diet' - *nisi tantum ne esurirent.*

One can only speculate how Petronius capped off the third example! At any rate solemnity has again been punctured by the ridiculous; a possible protest has been turned instead to humorous account.

If Petronius indeed had little liking for the emperor socially, and possibly politically, his day to day dealings with him would have required circumspection; both in what he wrote and how he explained possible references to Nero in it; while still making it clear to those who had the required perception that he was not uncritical of the emperor. Bishop (1964,152) observes that, of all the characters around towards the end of Nero's reign, Petronius alone seems completely at ease. That may be true on the evidence available, but *dissimulatio* would ever be a useful attribute.

Bartsch (1994,90) makes the interesting point that some writers were eager to use the defence of 'it's all in your head', which seems to have been 'a familiar if not always effective attempt to save some space for literary double speak.' In this respect she notes Phaedrus, III *Prol.*,45-50 and Juvenal, I,151-171. Certainly such a

defence is one which I could imagine Petronius using, if people began to enquire too closely into his supposed allusions; yet another example of his *dissimulatio* perhaps.

Perry (1967,205) puts forward the theory that 'Petronius wrote farce because he dared not write anything else; and he needed a large container into which he could pour, with some hope of impunity, all the wealth of literary, philosophical and artistic expression that was welling up inside his fertile genius.' This was to shield him against the thought that he might be engaged in other than 'tomfoolery'. Whilst it cannot be proved that this was the case, I am inclined to think that Petronius was using some such device to reveal at least some of his true feelings, and indeed his learning and literary flair, without causing too many repercussions. Williams (1978,289) even suggests that Petronius' 'mock will' could be read as a *roman à clef* where 'the initiated could find all Nero's favourite and embarrassing activities faithfully recorded, and with whom, if one puts the right name to the right characters.' That is an interesting theory, but one that could only be tested if we had the complete 'will'. Certainly I have some sympathy for the theory that Petronius was concentrating on the farcical in his work to give the impression that it should not be taken too seriously - otherwise it might be seen as competition to Nero's 'serious' work - and that any criticisms in it, real or alleged, should not be taken too

seriously either. So, if Petronius did mean his work to have some real import, then *dissimulatio* might be needed.

Rankin (1971,6-7) takes a similar view: that Petronius' apparent simplicity and naiveté could have saved him from appearing to attack Nero. However, it cannot be known how serious Petronius may have been 'in the assumption of the mask that Tacitus describes. It is clear that he was capable of interpreting life at more than one level of meaning;' as I have already noted.

Sandy (1969,301) claims that Petronius refused to allow others, and himself, to take life seriously; which resulted in a certain amount of self mockery. 'At times he is a *dissimulator operis sui*.... Thus the characters .... regularly make mockery of their supposedly serious intentions.' He points out later parallels in *Don Juan* and *Tristram Shandy*. Byron and Sterne, being enemies of whatever is stylised and artificial, thus 'debunk their own works so as to avoid the pitfall of pedantic dogmatisms or crank conventions' (302). That may be true to some extent of the *Satyricon*. However, I feel again that *dissimulatio* more probably lies behind Petronius' desire not to appear too serious, lest certain persons take the work to heart and apply particular references to themselves. Whether Petronius was the enemy of 'the stylised and artificial', and he may have been, would be to them somewhat irrelevant.

Griffin (1984,143) makes the point that Petronius apparently avoided the higher forms of poetry that Nero

cultivated; his real trouble came from the envy of Tigellinus. 'Petronius had clearly not attacked the Emperor in the *Satyricon*, or Nero completely failed to recognise that he had, for Petronius was in high favour with him down to 66.' As Nero was astonished by the list of his perversions in Petronius' 'will', it would seem unlikely that the *Satyricon* was already full of allusions to Nero's behaviour. I feel that that may be true of the work as a whole, and that Petronius somehow got away with the limited number of probable references to Nero in the extant portion. His actual position of 'high favour' with Nero must, however, be viewed with caution. At any rate, like any writer of ability, he would simply have to watch his step.

I feel, however, that Petronius was trying to attract an audience of some kind. Too little publicity for his work might lead to its remaining in obscurity, too much might arouse the emperor's jealousy. Walsh (1970,71) suggests that, as Petronius was a 'privileged intimate' of the emperor, he did not fall into the category of Lucan. Petronius' actual position as a 'privileged intimate' is, I repeat, open to argument. Moreover, Lucan too seems earlier to have had a similar relationship, but to have squandered it by his criticism and/or success in winning an audience. Perhaps that led to Petronius being more wary.

Did Petronius then confine his initial readings to a limited audience (which was not unusual), but hope that

news of his work would get around a wider circle - either by word of mouth, or by those 'underground' methods which seem to spring up where a work many might want to read has had its 'official' circulation limited for one reason or another? Perhaps he hoped that, as Rudich says (1997,250), 'Within and without the Neronian court, the *Satyricon* could indeed have been read rhetorically as sheer entertainment by a "politically innocent" reader,' who was interested only in the sexual intrigue or the satire of the vulgar, and reluctant to look for any hidden dissidence which may have resulted from Petronius' *dissimulatio*.

It may well be that the *dissimulatio* employed in the events and characters of Petronius' novel reflected and was consequent upon the *dissimulatio* which he had to employ in real life, and which kept him out of trouble for so long. It is tempting to believe that, but I do not believe that a link between the two is absolutely essential. It is perfectly possible to lead a life of deception and write of undeceptive people, or to write of disreputable people and be a reasonably virtuous person oneself. This latter would seem to have been true of *Tristram Shandy* and its author. While I certainly would not discount Rudich's argument, I would hesitate to push it too far. Nor do I think that the nature of the relationship between Petronius and Nero has been sufficiently well established from the evidence available for any absolutely firm stand to be made.

To sum up, I would concur with Gill (1973,182) when he writes: 'Whether the displays in the *Cena* and the sexual *spectacula* reflect the home life of an emperor known to be less than backward in such matters .... is certainly not verifiable.'

c) Petronius and Society

While Petronius' possible relationship with Nero naturally dominates scholars' considerations of his lifestyle and attitudes, one must also consider what he may have thought of others, as revealed in his work.

In 42 Seleucus describes women as 'a set of kites' - a remark which would not have been out of character with that personage, or the time and place. Similarly Lichas in 113.2 comments adversely on the widow of Ephesus. Richlin (1983,194), while pointing out Petronius' satire of women, accepts that such satire is wholly consistent with the viewpoint of other satirists. Petronius' women form a cavalcade of stereotypes found in Roman satire. She mentions the *vetula* in 7, Quartilla, that 'monster of orgiastic religiosity', the wealthy harridans Fortunata and Scintilla, Circe and her maid, each on the lookout for a man outside her class, Oenothea, like all witches, 'a danger to virility'. Juvenal attacked a similar spectrum. Thus Petronius was not unusual in making harsh comment on women, though in fact there is no concerted attack on them in his work. In that he would seem to be keeping to the 'cultural framework' of his time. Also Petronius may have felt that a narrative work had little room for invective against women. He would simply deal with them as they occurred in the plot; as in Fortunata's quarrel with Trimalchio (74).

Chapter 44 contains attacks on two targets, local government and contemporary religious attitudes: 'There

has been a famine for a whole year now. Damn the magistrates who play "Scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours" in league with the bakers. So the little people come off badly.' Alleged corruption in local and national government was of course nothing new in Greece or Rome; nor has it abated in the centuries since. Whether indeed the magistrates were corrupt or inept, the local population would always have its suspicions.

So that target of Ganymede is not an unusual one. Of his other he says: 'Now no one believes that the gods are gods.... No one cares a button for religion: they all shut their eyes and count their own goods.' Again throughout the ages there have been attacks on religion and the religious. Petronius, however, is not attacking religion as such here. Indeed he almost seems to be defending traditional religion through Ganymede's criticism of those who fail in religious observance and concern themselves more with material things, thus bringing the disfavour of the gods upon the community. There has never been a lack of those inside, or on the fringes of a religion, who criticise the current practice, or lack of it, in that religion. Whether an age has been considered 'religious' or not, there have always been many willing to discuss religion, particularly to its detriment. The angle of attack may vary, but the target is always the same. Thus once again a Petronian character is aiming at a target which was neither new nor unusual.

Ganymede, Echion, Hermeros and others were freedmen

guests of the freedman Trimalchio, whose banquet forms the largest complete episode in the *Satyricon* as we have it. In the course of it the key target of Petronius' attacks seems to be the freedmen who wielded such influence in contemporary Rome; and their ostentation, vulgarity and general commonness: 'Trimalchio, a very rich man - he has a clock and a uniformed trumpeter to keep telling him how much of his life is lost and gone' (26); the showy exercise of Trimalchio; the procession that took him home; the varied plethora of his servants; the splendours of his dining room and table; the wonders of the meal; and many others.

However, at no point in his description does the narrator make any open criticism of Trimalchio as a person; 'Indeed we complimented our host on his arrangements' (34). Trimalchio's riposte that 'These filthy slaves will make us hot by crowding past us' brings no comment from Encolpius or his friends. It may be true that at this point they are only too glad to get a meal, and would not indulge in open criticism of their host. Even so they do seem gradually to become more nonplussed by the unpredictability of the meal and its host.

In 49 Encolpius is made to utter a remark which is quickly seen to be foolish. The 'spontaneous applause' in 50,1 seems to affect Encolpius' views on Trimalchio, whom he now expects to give his views 'with his usual effrontery.' In 53 Encolpius is still prepared to accept Trimalchio's jokes, as does Agamemnon, who 'knew how to

earn a second invitation to dinner.' Then Encolpius rightly fears that the injured slave is a prelude to some comic turn, but nevertheless they applaud Trimalchio's action (55,1). Ascyltus rather overdoes the laughter, and events turn sour as Hermeros turns on him. Giton too falls foul of Hermeros in 58,1, though Trimalchio stops the unseemliness. Again in 60 Encolpius is made to fear as the ceiling shakes, but again it is a trick. All are delighted, however, by Niceros' story in 61 ,and Trimalchio's in 63. Encolpius again reacts with fear in 65, this time at the arrival of Habinnas. This, I suspect, was the beginning of the end for Encolpius. In 68 Habinnas' slave's recitation of Vergil disconcerts him, as do his other efforts at entertainment: *nec ullus tot malorum finis fuisset* (69). In 72 Encolpius is ready to slip away when the others go to the bath. He is unsuccessful and has to endure more boasting from Trimalchio, along with a description of his funeral arrangements.

By 78 'The whole thing had become perfectly sickening,' and finally, 'My friends and I seized this welcome opportunity .... and took to our heels as quickly as if it were a real fire.' It seems that Trimalchio's drunken ramblings about death, and his own in particular, had become too much for Encolpius. Certainly the ending seems sudden and contrived: a slave happened to blow too loudly; the watch happened to be passing and did its duty. This suddenness may be an effort to get out of a

situation which is getting uncontrollable and/or protracted. It is also reminiscent of the mime.

Perhaps Petronius might feel rather superior when he heard the freedmen speak: in the common manner of the day, not in that of so called refined people. There have been many analyses of the language used, and its purpose. It may be that Petronius was sneering at the freedmen, or trying to achieve realism, or speaking to a particular audience. Whatever the case, there is no overt criticism of their language as such.

One must wonder whether Petronius himself had had to suffer dinner parties where the host and/or guests were not to his liking. He probably had little difficulty in getting invitations to dinner, but the relation of Encolpius' misfortunes, gaffes and irritations may be a reflection of the fact that not all dinner parties were wholly pleasurable for all the participants. It is difficult to see at which point, if any, Encolpius became Petronius, but the arrival of Habinnas, yet another tiresome freedman, may be that point.

There were very many freedmen in Italy at that time. Whether a significant proportion of them were anything like Trimalchio we cannot know. Probably there were some who rose from humble beginnings to be as vulgar as he, and whose uncouth speech would have grated on the ears of more refined Romans. Though Trimalchio says that he himself spurned any position of real power on the political scene (71), there were many freedmen who had attained such

power. In Claudius' reign in particular, freedmen like Callistus, Narcissus and Pallas had achieved great power in the court and government, as described by Tacitus (*Annals*, XI,28). He seems less than enthusiastic about them. Suetonius comments (*Claudius*, 29): 'Claudius fell so deeply under the influence of these freedmen and wives that he seemed to be their servant rather than their emperor.' While the influence of the imperial freedmen may have been less under Nero, the memory of events under Claudius may still have rankled in some quarters a decade after his death.

The parvenu was not new to literature. Some of Theophrastus' *Characters*, such as those illustrating ill-breeding, pretentiousness and tactlessness, make one think of Trimalchio; as does Nasidienus in Horace, *Satires*, II,8. Petronius may have had him in mind as he was writing. Indeed throughout history anyone who has got above his or her supposed station in life has been liable to be the target of finger pointing or scorn or envy; and, although some of the situations and people described in the *Cena* had purely Roman attributes, such people in general have always been targets for criticism. So, while Petronius appeared to be criticising certain sectors of the society in which he lived, he was doing nothing unusual. Since others were doing it, he possibly felt safe in doing so too.

One also suspects that Petronius was not expecting his audience or anyone else to do anything about the matters

complained of. People had complained about such things for ages, without any real result, as Persius and Juvenal seem to imply in the introductions to their works. Petronius perhaps best sums up such complaints as *fabulae* (47,1). It was all very different from criticising the emperor. Moreover, since his apparent criticism was embedded in amusing incidents and/or couched in amusing terms, and without any out and out personal denunciation, Petronius could hardly be seen as engaging on a vitriolic attack on any group in society or on society as a whole.

Yet one can ask whether he was attacking specific persons in the course of his attacks on apparently conventional targets. Nero was no doubt a host who had to be flattered; particular freedmen may have had to be put up with; an actual educationist, eager poet or other writer, incompetent doctor, grasping lawyer or local politician may have featured in Petronius' life. His readers may have recognised specific targets, had they felt so inclined, but it is vain for modern commentators to try to identify them. Also other groups may have been targetted in the lost portions of the work. At any rate, in these apparent attacks Petronius' *dissimulatio* had less need to be brought into play; other than perhaps in concealing his real personality.

3. PETRONIUS AS A PROTESTER - Literary Background

a) Petronius, Seneca and Lucan as Persons

In addition to Petronius' possible *dissimulatio* in his relationship with Nero, there may also have been some in his relations with other writers of his time, such as Seneca and Lucan. The main possible points of contact between Petronius' work and that of Seneca and Lucan lie in the two long poems in the *Satyricon* uttered by the 'poet' Eumolpus. In 89 there is a poem of 65 senarii, which some claim to have echoes of Senecan tragedy; and in 119-124 a poem of 194 hexameters, which some read as a parody on Lucan's epic. The first poem is usually termed the *Troiae Halosis*, and the second *de Bello Civili* or *Bellum Civile*. I do not intend to become embroiled in all the lengthy controversies regarding the possible connections between these poems and the works of Seneca and Lucan, but some examination of them must be made of them with regard to Petronius' use of *dissimulatio* as a weapon in his protests.

Perhaps *dissimulatio* is a slightly inaccurate term to use in this respect. What will be seen is a further example of Petronius' method of indirect attack: not so much on the poets themselves as on the kinds of poetry, and their practitioners, which they represent; and through them on the educational system which produced such practitioners.

Petronius largely puts views on the contemporary artistic scene into the mouth and around the person of

Eumolpus, who first appears in 83: 'He was shabby in appearance, so it was quite plain by this sign alone that he was a man of letters, of a kind that rich men are accustomed to hate.... "I am a poet," he said.... "The worship of genius never made a man rich."' He then goes on to relate how much money is earned by the trader, soldier, flatterer etc, while writers are destitute. Of course Petronius is again introducing nothing new. The alleged or apparent neglect of the arts and artists by the rich or by society as a whole was not a new one; nor has it ever ceased. In 84, which is affected by apparent lacunae, Eumolpus displays his 'persecution complex', as he claims that everyone hates him and his kind; in a mixture of philosophy and rhetoric. If Petronius was attacking what was going on in contemporary art and society, he was toning down his criticism by putting it into the wild outpourings of the ridiculous Eumolpus. We cannot say whether Petronius himself believed Eumolpus' claims, yet he saw fit to give expression to them.

Rather less obvious is the fact that, while poets were complaining about their treatment at the hands of contemporary society, there was no particular shortage of those wishing to try their hand at poetry. There may never have been. Perhaps Eumolpus was representative of a class when he said in 89,1: 'I see your whole attention is riveted on that picture.... Well, I will try and explain the situation in verse:' a class who were engaged in writing poetry in their free time and were only too

happy, as Eumolpus here, to burst into verse at the slightest opportunity. Moreover, it is interesting that Aeneas' relation of the fall of Troy and its aftermath in *Aeneid* II and III causes a break in the author's narrative. The similar ecphrasis technique here, and general imitation of Vergil seen in his successors, may also be satirised here.

Before going on to explore the possible relationship between Petronius and contemporary poets and their poetry, it is well to bear the following admonition of Conte (1996,27) very much in mind: 'If one concentrates on the text rather than the author, ... then one will be less likely to fall into the common philological trap of seeing textual resemblances as produced by the intentionality of a literary subject whose only desire is to emulate. The philologist who seeks at all cost to read intention into imitation will inevitably fall into a psychological reconstruction of the motive,' whatever it may be. It would appear indeed that commentators have fallen at times into this 'philological' trap. Moreover, the actual text seems somehow to have been lost sight of in the speculations of some. Conte makes his view clear (34): The *Satyricon* is a 'narrative to read and follow in its own peculiar and complex autonomy of reading.' Enjoyment of it is of prime importance, but one must be aware of other factors involved; and reasoned speculation, especially on the two long poems, should be encouraged.

Sullivan claims (1985,176): 'The literary feud

between the rising, or now established, arbiter of elegance and the two most brilliant ex-members of Nero's court circle, Lucan and Seneca, is susceptible of many explanations.' It is indeed; it is also susceptible of none! - particularly as it is not absolutely clear whether such a feud existed anyway. It may be true that there was an antipathy between the styles of life and thought favoured by Seneca and Lucan on one side and Petronius on the other. However, I must stress that this does not mean that there was any personal animosity between them, or that the *Satyricon* was written as an expression of any such animus. Sullivan blandly states (178): 'This tenuous web of evidence reveals a not unexpected literary and personal feud' between Petronius and the other two. I feel that 'tenuous' should have been heavily stressed. It is difficult to see the *Satyricon* as a protest against these two men personally, though it may be against their educational background.

Certainly a different line is followed by Rudich, who argues (1997,24) that there is no obvious attack in the *Satyricon* on Seneca as a person, though there may be one below the surface. He makes the interesting point that Seneca may have attacked Petronius: was he one of the *turba lucifugarum* described in *Epistles* 122,15? Such is a possibility, but only that. Also, while present scholarship tends to regard Seneca as the sub-text in *Troiae Halosis*, the matter 'still remains inconclusive' (226). Rudich then explores the possible relationship

between Seneca and Petronius, who probably knew each other personally if not closely. 'What must have mattered, so far as Seneca was concerned, is not a (possible) mild parody of his own tragic style, but the fact that the piece on the theme of his own plays was ascribed to Eumolpus, thus sealing the satiric parallel between the two.' I shall look at the possible resemblance between Seneca and Eumolpus later, but it might explain Seneca's possible use of *turba lucifugarum* with reference to Petronius.

Rankin (1971,50) notes that Petronius reveals a world where nothing and nobody can be relied upon. He holds a mirror up to the 'madness and anguish' that he saw in society; so he retreated from the light of day, preferring 'to be about his business and pleasure at night.' Rankin does not pursue this, but I think it is worth dwelling on. Perhaps Petronius felt that he could not face keeping up the pretence of being a conventional member of the court with the eyes of all on him during the day, and so withdrew from the open glare; and felt that night time was more conducive to whatever talking, writing or behaviour he wished to display. Alternately, he may have been one of those who only function successfully at night.

Panayotakis explores similar areas (1995,195). He thinks that, while Petronius had succeeded Seneca as Nero's expert on cultural and aesthetic affairs, the difference in tone and style between the works of the two

is so striking that 'one rightly wonders whether "The *Satyricon* was written as a deliberate successsor to Seneca's worthy Stoic plays" [Walsh, 1974,190].' Panayotakis continues: 'Petronius' decision to write a novel which was considered a disreputable literary form *per se*, makes a sharp contrast with Seneca's conventional artistic preferences.' The farcical elements in the *Satyricon* would make the contrast even sharper. Walsh in fact goes on from the above quote: 'Apart from lending extra point to the guying of Senecan style in the *Halosis Troiae* and the sententious utterances of Seneca's moral epistles, this juxtaposition of lubricious and worthy entertainment seems very much in character with our *arbiter elegantiae*.'

I rather think that Walsh and Panayotakis have perhaps stepped beyond the grounds of probability in saying that the *Troiae Halosis*, and indeed the *Satyricon* as a whole is some sort of riposte to Seneca, both as a person and an author. Simply because author A writes in a different style and/or in a different literary form from Author B, it does not mean that they are enemies. Nor does the fact that Author A is (possibly) parodying Author B. It may indeed be the case that Seneca and Petronius disliked each other, but that cannot really be inferred from the *Satyricon*, even if the alleged references to Seneca could be proved.

It is of course very attractive to regard Petronius' work as an attack on Seneca. Certainly it is possible to

see signs of Seneca in Eumolpus: the over-officious fusspot, always telling other people how they should behave, while never being particularly careful about practising what he preaches (88). One can almost sympathise with the people who stoned Eumolpus as he recited (90). Is it possible to see Seneca in 'He recognised this tribute to his genius, covered his head and fled out of the temple'? This, I suspect, is on the same level as seeing Petronius in the *turba lucifugarum*; it is tempting, it fits, but it cannot be confirmed. Nor can any firm assertions be made about any relationship between Seneca and Petronius. Their characters were probably different. Seneca was a Stoic, Petronius, as shall be seen, probably an Epicurean. One suspects that Seneca would not have appreciated the rise of Petronius' influence at court as his own waned; particularly if he saw that influence being less savoury than his own. However, I feel that it is not possible to stretch that into a definite personal animosity between the two. Indeed by the time that Petronius was writing both he and Seneca had to beware of offending Nero; yet neither felt sufficiently antagonistic towards him to join in the Pisonian conspiracy.

Since the *de Bello Civili* is more than four times the length of the *Troiae Halosis*, it has afforded more opportunities for commentators to analyse its style and content. As the former bears some resemblance to Lucan's *Pharsalia*, I-III, and since that part of Lucan's poem was

published by the time at which the extant portion of the *Satyricon* appears to have been published, comparisons between the two are hardly unexpected, and alleged parodies of Lucan by Petronius are frequent. Again it is probable that Petronius would be acquainted personally with Lucan, if not as a friend. Lucan had initially had a tolerable relationship with Nero, but the quality of his poetry seems to have incurred the latter's envy, and relationships gradually deteriorated to the extent that the main part of the *Pharsalia* may not have been published during Lucan's lifetime; either because of its anti-imperial sentiment or because it may have excited imperial envy and therefore enmity. At any rate Lucan, fatally, joined the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero in 65.

Petronius kept out of that plot, but that need not show that he felt any differently towards Nero than Lucan did. Nor need it show that Petronius felt any antipathy towards Lucan. There may be many other reasons why Petronius was not involved in the plot. There are probable references to the *Pharsalia* in *de Bello Civili*, but Petronius may again be attacking the whole class of contemporary epic writers rather than one in particular. Moreover, even if he was parodying Lucan, that again does not mean that he felt any animus towards him. Lucan, like Seneca, may have been unhappy about Petronius' rise and apparent position at court, but may not have felt any personal antipathy towards him. We simply cannot be sure.

b) Petronius, Seneca and Lucan as Writers

Simply because of lack of historical evidence and of any evidence in their works that can be definitely confirmed, it is difficult to establish the personal relationship between the men. However, Petronius' work does give a little more scope for dealing with his possible relationship with them as writers.

Petronius' *Troiae Halosis*, which begins in 89,2, deals with the events described in Book II of Vergil's *Aeneid*. There can be little question of Petronius parodying Vergil here, a poet whom Encolpius is portrayed as liking (68): *tunc primum me etiam Vergilius offenderit*. Walsh (1970,47) suggests that Petronius was attacking 'a contemporary phenomenon, a city of tragic versifiers of whom Seneca is the best known representative' - similar to the idea which I mentioned above. He then draws parallels between the poem and some of Seneca's tragedies, particularly the *Agamemnon*, 50-200.

However, de Saint-Denis makes the point (1965,256) that, if there is a pastiche in 89, it is perhaps on the style of Nero singing his *Fall of Troy* at the fire of Rome. Quite apart from the dangers inherent in Petronius writing an obvious parody of Nero's poem, it is wise to note de Saint-Denis's caveat: 'It is another hypothesis; but it is unverifiable, as we do not possess the great majority of the latter poem.'

Certainly Sullivan is much more convinced of the parallels between the *Troiae Halosis* and Seneca. In

1968 [1],187, he points to Petronius' familiarity with, and following of 'the technique of the Senecan trimeter.' He also notes repetition of words in one form or another, at the end of lines, noting some half dozen sets of examples in a poem of 65 lines. While the Romans were more tolerant of verbal repetitions than we are, the device seems deliberate and pointing directly to Seneca's tragedies. '[188] When we add the many echoes of Senecan tragedy found in the *Troiae Halosis*, the conclusion is hard to resist that the poem is a general imitation and parody of Seneca's tragic style.' The subject matter of the fall of Troy and Vergil's version of the Laocoon story 'recalls vaguely' Seneca's plays the *Agamemnon* and the *Troades;* and Sullivan provides other examples.

While Sullivan's argument may appear convincing on the surface, he fails to produce any example of Petronius clearly and unarguably parodying Senecan tragedy. Indeed the many parallels and contrasts which he draws on pages 193-210 are more convincing in making it clear that Petronius was well aware of Seneca the Younger and his writings, without making any express attack on the man and his work. Sullivan rather weakens his case by admitting that Romans were 'more tolerant' of verbal repetitions than we are; that the *Troiae Halosis* is a 'general imitation' of Senecan tragedy; and that the Laocoon incident 'recalls vaguely' a Senecan tragedy. After all, any writings about that particular subject are likely to recall any other writings on it. Vergil's description of

it is vivid and shocking enough, and famous enough, but no claim is made that Petronius is parodying Vergil.

I feel then that the argument about parallels in content between the works of Seneca and Petronius does not stand up, other than in the most general terms. Likewise more convincing verbal parallels would be needed to say that Petronius was making a deliberate and easily recognisable parody of Senecan tragic verse. The best that can be said is that there are some general likenesses which might ring a bell in the memory of a reader familiar with Seneca's writings.

Conte (1986,38) sees another use for allusivenness in the literary world: 'When a past text is summoned up allusively, ... allusion works as an extension of the other weapons in the poet's armoury.... Thus allusion works in just the same way .... as a rhetorical figure;' and he elaborates on pages 66-69. Conte was writing about poetry in his work, but the same can be applied to prose. Thus the quote from Vergil in 68 in the mouth of Habinnas' slave, and Encolpius' remarks on it, tell the reader much about Habinnas and the narrator.

Coffey (1976,191) sums it up neatly when he says that the *Troiae Halosis* might suggest to a reader 'the declamatory format and manner' of Seneca's tragedies rather than those of any other writer; but we should be 'reluctant to make the assumption with confidence,' for there is no parody as such in Petronius' poem.

It is also possible that modern commentators with

little sympathy for the style and bombastic nature of Seneca's tragedies may have assumed that Romans of that time may have felt the same about them. Such an assumption is a dangerous one. They may indeed have had little effect on Romans used to such things. As I have said, Petronius, and probably his audience were aware of Seneca's work. It may not have registered all that strongly with them. They may also have been aware of the serried ranks of Seneca's imitators. Possibly the latter concerned Petronius more than Seneca himself.

Rudich (1997,227) makes the point that, because its subject was popular in Roman literature, the *Troiae Halosis* could have been intended or perceived as 'a travesty .... of any other text beside Seneca's: such as the *Aeneid*, Lucan's lost *Iliacon*,and .... the epic on the fall of Troy penned by Nero;' though the last would be a risky proceeding. However, I must again emphasise that any poem on the fall of Troy was almost sure to overlap on any other, certainly in content, possibly even in style. That view is developed by Connors (1998,87) when she notes that, because of the prominence of the capture of Troy in the *Aeneid*, 'the central cultural document of Rome', Petronius would have composed his poem with Vergil's version 'in the background'. I would go further and say that it would be very much in the foreground, perhaps almost to the exclusion of any other possible influences. For whatever familiarity the works of Seneca, Lucan and Nero may have had among Petronius' audience, it would have

paled before familiarity with the *Aeneid*, the prime 'set book' of Roman education.

Rudich (1997,239) may have another point when he notes that under Nero Roman society, following his lead, 'experienced what may be called "a desire to perform in public",' both in the broader sense and the narrower 'theatrical' one. Nero was not the only powerful man to appear on stage. This appears to tie in with what Walsh (1970,47) wrote about Rome being 'a city of tragic versifiers.' [*5]

While it may be an exaggeration to say that everyone went around with an epic or tragedy concealed in his toga, ready to read or even perform to any unsuspecting person he might meet - as is implied in Juvenal I,1-21 - here we seem to have a phenomenon, linked with the mass of potential poets and tragedians, which may have amused or irritated Petronius enough to poke some fun at it; both directly in the case of Eumolpus, and indirectly in the case of Seneca. Since Petronius here writes in senarii, it is probably the ranks of tragedians he is mocking. This could again be an example of Petronius' two levels of attack, and indeed of a kind of *dissimulatio*. [*6]

Also Petronius may again be attacking the rhetorical content of contemporary education by making fun of the rhetorical, high flown content and style of tragedy, particularly the messenger's speech that was common in this genre in ancient times: e.g. 89, lines 24-26, 29-34, 54-55. This again may have recalled Seneca in the minds

of some readers, without the necessity to make more or less direct quotations from his work. It may also have jogged their memories about some purple patches of high flown rhetoric that may have formed part of their own education. Again Petronius may be attacking his target by other than direct means. Certainly some of these considerations which have occurred with regard to the *Troiae Halosis* will recur in an examination of the *de Bello Civili*.

That poem is again an alleged composition of Eumolpus. This time he explains some of the thought behind it (118): 'The free spirit of genius must plunge headlong into allusions and divine interpositions, and rack itself for great thoughts coloured by mythology, so that what results seems rather the prophecies of an inspired seer than the exactitude of an oath made before witnesses: the following effusion will show what I mean, ... though it has not yet received my final touches.' To take two contrasting areas between this and Lucan's *Pharsalia*: Lucan's poem is notable for *not* having any of the 'divine interpositions', so common in ancient epic; on the other hand, it had many an 'effusion', and the 'final touches' had not been put to it at the time of Petronius' writing, nor were they ever to be. Hence commentators have had a field day over the possible relationship between the two poems and their authors.

In 1968 [1],173 Sullivan lists the possible things that Petronius was trying to do in his poem: a) parodying

and criticising Lucan; b) imitating and defending him; c) reworking Lucanic material into a more acceptable epic form; d) aiming at a different primary object, to which his use of Lucan is strictly secondary: namely satirising the vices of the age that led to the Civil Wars; or defending Caesar from Lucan's Republican bias; or criticising the decay of oratory and poetry that produced Lucan. In that survey Sullivan was apparently drawing on the work of Sochatoff (1962,449-458), where the latter says that most critics have seen the poem as an attack on Lucan; others have regarded it and the critical passage that leads into it as an attack on traditional methods; or on the kind of people exemplified by Eumolpus (450).

Not all of those views can be held together of course. Sochatoff throws further light on the problem (455): 'Scholia written throughout the two manuscripts reflect the attitude that the *Bellum Civile* was an invective flaying the vices of the Romans.' For instance, the *intentio* of both manuscripts states: 'He attacked the vices of the Romans, especially greed out of which arose strife, firstly with foreign nations, then among citizens. Finally the freedom of the Roman state was taken from it. Beginning therefore from indignation, as is the custom with satirists, he laid into their greed.' Certainly line 3, *nec satiatus erat,* would support that view. Indeed lines 1-60 are almost parallelled in Tacitus' attack on the Empire in Calgacus' 'battle speech' in *Agricola,* 30-32.

Sochatoff notes as questionable this view that the purpose of the poem is limited, but that 'It is not to be put aside as totally unreasonable.' He adds (457) that attacking the moral decline of their fellows was a common practice in Roman writers, and cites Seneca the Elder (*Controversiae* I, *praef.*7) and Quintilian (II,2,5). I would also add that anyone writing about the Civil Wars, be it Lucan, Petronius or whoever, was almost bound to remark on the decline in moral standards, and the general enervation, among the Romans at that time. From the above it may seem that Petronius had a different primary aim from an attack on Lucan; but there are others who think differently.

For instance, Luck (1972,131-141) thinks that Petronius is castigating Lucan by paying him an 'elaborate tribute'; while showing that he himself can handle the 'modern style'. However, if it is such a tribute, it is strange that scholars still have to argue about seeing any kind of tribute or reference.

Walsh observes (1970,49) that Petronius' poem is in a tone similar to Lucan's, but the similarities in phraseology and metrical technique are such that 'Petronius must be characterising Eumolpus as a poet who succumbs to the flamboyance of Lucan's poetical manner.... This is not a demonstration of how Petronius thought such a poem should be written; it is how Eumolpus thinks it should be written.' That may be true, but again I would stress that we have no way of divining Petronius' personal

thoughts on the matter.

Walsh, however, then goes on to exemplify some parallels in phraseology and metre between Petronius and Lucan's poems. Among those least convinced by these is George (1974), who thinks that Petronius in the *de Bello Civili* seems to have used none of the devices that are normal for the parodist and whose use could be said to constitute part of the definition of parody. As I have said before, if there is real doubt as to whether or whom a writer is parodying, then there is probably no parody as such; perhaps just the odd reference, parallel or allusion.

George says (132) that his discussion was to support the argument that the *de Bello Civili* was not directly dependent upon any part of Lucan's poem in style, diction, structure or comment. 'It remains possible that Petronius was aware in a general way of some of the general characteristics of Lucan's work, but this hypothesis becomes far less attractive once the specific parallels have been seen to break down under scrutiny.' That may be so; however, I would add that it is perfectly possible for someone to have read another's work and to include some general points from it in one's own work, without making any specific parallels or copying of style etc.; and to do so without being seen as either supporting or opposing that author or his work.

George is perhaps right in comparing Eumolpus with the rhetorician Agamemnon (133): both are examples of the

bona mens, who undertake the edification of Encolpius; who are 'incompetent hypocrites'; and are 'portraits of pretentiousness in their respective vocations'. I might add that both seem cheerfully unconcerned about the criticisms they incur; compare 3-4 where Agamemnon loads the blame on to the parents and 90 where Eumolpus is philosophical about being stoned. Although George does not make the point, I again think it is possible to see a reflection of Seneca in the above; though again I would not like to push the comparison too far. It is not exact, and there were probably plenty of other people around whom readers might have recognised as the general butt of Petronius' humour.

I also feel that Highet (1941,176) makes a valid point when he writes that parody on the scale of the *Satyricon* would be extremely tedious, and there are numerous long episodes in it which cannot be interpreted 'as parodies or part of a parodic scheme.' It may have had a mock-heroic skeleton, 'but it was much bigger than parody.' Once again I feel that an attempt to fit the work into one particular straitjacket tends to fall down when one considers its mass and variety, and the difficulty of sustaining one particular facet throughout.

N. Slater (1990,190) noted that a first reading of the poem showed it to be an utterance in character, being an expression of the inadequacies of Eumolpus as a poet. 'We noted the confusion caused for the reader when Homer, Vergil and Horace are cited for this exercise in epic. We

saw that the lack of clear linguistic parallels to a previous single source overthrew any attempt to read the poem as a straighforward parody, with a single target and a set agenda.' I would agree with that, and would further assert that his last words could possibly also apply to the extant work as a whole. I would also agree with his further claim (198) that nothing in our understanding of parody prevents us from viewing the *de Bello Civili* as a send up of contemporary epic in general. He points to Heseltine's comments (1969,383) to the effect that Petronius' poem presents a programme as much as a parody. [*7]

Heseltine notes that the *de Bello Civili* is not very good in itself or in constant parody. However, it may possibly include: a) parody of a widespread area of anti-imperial epic, such as Lucan was in fact working on; b) parody of features of rhetorical poetry such as messengers' speeches in tragedies, and imaginary actions of gods. Heseltine's view is a tenable one, given the probable literary and political situation at the time of the *Satyricon's* composition. Slater (199) puts forward the idea of the poem being a test case for our view of the work as a whole. The question must be whether it was just one finite incident capable of being detached from the whole, as one of a series of scenes, as Sullivan would wish (1985,162). 'If .... we find consistency of narrative and characterisation elsewhere in the *Satyricon*, we have no reason to interpret the *Bellum Civile* as a

programmatic parody of a single source, when we find such nowhere else.' Slater goes on to try to substantiate this largely convincing view.

Thus, since there would seem to be significant doubt about whether Petronius was attacking and/or criticising Lucan, one should perhaps look elsewhere for the purpose, if any, of the *de Bello Civili*. The view that it may in some way be a defence of Lucan and his work cannot, I think, be supported on the evidence available. Indeed one could almost quote some of the alleged parallels between the two poems as being as much as a defence of, as an attack on, Lucan.

De Saint-Denis points out (1965,256) that, while certain lines underneath may recall passages of Lucan, 'reminders of Vergil are no less frequent.' So, if Petronius is making a pastiche, it is on the Neo-Vergilians with their insistence on divine interventions and the like. I feel that such an idea goes along well with my assertion that Petronius was attacking the general mass of epic versifiers.

Hutchinson (1982,46) makes the point that the poem is 'not bad enough to be a good parody', nor is it good enough to be a proper alternative to Lucan's work. He too points out the great popularity of Vergil and Ovid and the effects which they had on later writers. For instance Ovid's *Medea* had much effect, and inferior successors may have imitated it. Hence Petronius was mocking such imitations: not only their subject matter but also their

style, 'which was probably second nature to the spectators of the time.' I agree, and am also tempted to accept his point that that may have been what caused the crowd to react angrily to Eumolpus' recital: 'They had heard it all before.' Certainly it would have been an understandable reaction at that point. Even so, I would also support Beck's claim (1979,240) that Eumolpus was more than just a 'manic poetaster' common to his age. He is indeed a 'distinct individual', and certainly one of the *Satyricon's* more important characters.

Zeitlin (1971 [1],80) notes in Lucan's work the obvious bias against the Empire, or at least the misuse of power by certain emperors; which is far more explicit than any of Petronius' alleged methods in attacking the emperor may have been. She also notes the comments of Perry (1967,205) quoted above, adding that Lucan also echoes the *topoi* of vice and corruption in Rome, while focussing on personalities and events. 'In this sense, Lucan's work can be considered mainly political, while Petronius' is mainly social and moral.' That may well be true about Lucan, but it is less obviously so about Petronius. He makes social and moral comment, but whether such themes are the main ones of his work in general I would regard as questionable.

At any rate one is left with the suspicion that Lucan was not the sole or even the main target of the poem. As the scholia remark, Petronius may have been attacking the vices which nurtured the Civil Wars, and which indeed were

not absent from Neronian Rome. The first twelve lines of the poem would seem to support that. Certainly Petronius is less critical of Julius Caesar than Lucan was in the *Pharsalia* as a whole; though it would seem that *Pharsalia* I-III, with which *de Bello Civili* has some parallels, particularly in content, express less criticism of him proportionally than does the rest of the poem. The latter was composed when Lucan was less enamoured of the royal house, and may not indeed have been published just then.

In the *de Bello Civili*, as in the *Troiae Halosis*, Petronius would seem rather to be making an indirect criticism of the decay in literature nurtured by the educational system of the day. Again purple patches appear in lines 1 and 2, to set the tone right away; see also lines 27-39, 63-66, *et passim*. If Petronius was parodying anything, it was the rhetorical content of contemporary education and literature. Lucan could well have been regarded as an exemplar of that, and, as his *Pharsalia* would be fresh in the minds of Petronius and his readers, part of its content could be used for some of Petronius' plot and some of his criticism of contemporary education. Sullivan (1968 [1],165) claims that Petronius put his finger on what later critics noted as the main characteristic of Silver Latin literature, 'the influence of rhetoric on poetry.' I must say that it is difficult to refute that. Hints at Lucan's style in Petronius' poem may indeed have rung a bell in the minds of his hearers. However, if any of them had not read Lucan, little harm

would have been done; the rhetorical content of the *de Bello Civili* might have caused them still to appreciate the protest anyway.

c) Educational and Literary Decline

The protest about the contemporary educational system is an obvious one in the *Satyricon*. In 1 Encolpius rails against the system with its emphasis on rhetorical training: 'I believe that college makes complete fools of our young men.... You teachers more than anything have been the ruin of true eloquence.' He then compares contemporary literature unfavourably with that of the Greeks, both in style and content. This he connects with the respective education systems (2): 'In the age when Sophocles or Euripides found the inevitable word for their verse, young men were not yet confined to set speeches.... No cloistered pedant had yet ruined young men's brains.'

The rhetorician Agamemnon in 3 accepts the bulk of Encolpius' protest, but excuses the teachers: 'Unless they speak to the taste of the young masters, they will be left alone in the colleges.... It is the parents who should be attacked for refusing to allow their children to profit by stern discipline.' Thus the protest is widened out to society as a whole, and its attitude to education, literature and the arts; usually one of lack of appreciation, as is later railed against by Eumolpus (83; 90; 118). The philistinism of society has of course long been a complaint of the 'educated' or 'cultured'; cf. Thomas Carlyle's estimate of his fellow citizens: 'Twenty seven millions, mostly fools' (*Latter Day Pamphlets*, No.6).

Petronius, however, was not the only Roman making such

protests. Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*, written perhaps twenty years after the *Satyricon*, deals with much the same theme; particularly in 28-30, where again society at large comes in for unfavourable comment. While that was not necessarily Tacitus' own opinion, he was certainly voicing concerns that were felt at that time.

Persius, Petronius' near contemporary, airs similar sentiments in *Satire* 1,63: '"Well, what does the public say?" What you'd expect.' Agamemnon in 4 expresses similar sentiments on modern literature, with a poem illustrating his ideas in 5; though it does not seem to be a parody of the early satirist Lucilius, whom he mentions with apparent favour.

Also at that time is thought to have lived the author known as 'Longinus'. The dates and details of his life are in dispute, but Russell (1964) argues positively that he lived at about that time. In *On the Sublime* 44, Longinus protests at the 'universal dearth of literature' and at the avarice and love of pleasure that are 'our two slave masters.' Conte (1996,44) even claims that that seems to be 'a fundamental theme of the *Satyricon*.' I feel that may be going rather too far, at least on the basis of the extant parts. Certainly there is avarice and love of pleasure in the *Cena*, and they may well have dominated the lives of some Romans; but they are not maintained throughout the work. The point that Petronius seems to me to be making is that these were concerns of his day.

Again, the parents of those whose education was being mishandled do not escape criticism (4,2): 'To begin with they consecrate even their young hopefuls, like everything else, to ambition. Then, if they are in a hurry for the fulfilment of their wishes, they drive the young schoolboy into the law courts.' This overambition for one's offspring was probably nothing new, and it is still apparent today; so Agamemnon's attack was nothing new or unusual.

Indeed education as a butt of everyday criticism goes back to the time of Aristophanes at the latest, with his ridicule of the 'new' education in *The Clouds*. Such an attack is also seen when the young students deride Agamemnon (6). Attacks on contemporary education also come from the freedmen in the *Cena*: Echion (44), Trimalchio himself (48), Niceros (61) and Habinnas (68). As is apparent from their words, however, their own education had not been of the best. Yet that did not stop them criticising contemporary education, good or bad.

An important adjunct of the education system was the legal system. Success in education led the way to success in the courts and thereby, in earlier years at any rate, to success in politics. With success in speaking being all important all the way up this ladder, it is little surprise that rhetoric was considered a very important part of education.

In 12-15 Encolpius and his friends get into a farcical situation over the theft of a cloak: 'Ascyltus was afraid

of the law.... He said, "It is better to get back our savings cheaply than to embark upon the perils of a lawsuit. Of what avail are laws to be where money rules alone and the poor suitor can never succeed?"' (14,1-3).

Indeed Connors in *Latin Fiction* (1999,65) sees the work as a whole series of direct or indirect brushes with the law. Examples include 1-5, 17, 35-37, 80, 111, 125 and 130. However, she makes the valid point that people in the *Satyricon* 'get away with most things.'

This poking fun at the legal system with its ineffectivenes, and its practitioners with their pomposity, may indeed be a form of protest by Petronius; both at the system itself and the educational structure which underpinned it. Yet again this cynical view of the legal system is hardly an unusual one. Throughout the ages there has been a suspicion in some quarters that the legal system exists to give justice to the wealthy alone and to put money in the pockets of the lawyers.

Nor did the medical profession escape. In 42 Seleucus is made to remark famously, *medicus enim nihil est quam animi consolatio.* The medical profession in those days was of course very limited as to what it could achieve; even when doing its best it was always open to jibes about its failures; as indeed it has continued to be. It must also be remarked that Roman doctors probably did not have the long educational experience that they have today, and generally would be products of the contemporary system with its faults and failings. Consequently Seleucus'

protest is not surprising.

The point must also be made that in Petronius' time the government had no real control over the education system's structure or content. It had always been provided by private enterprise, apparently in response to whatever its potential users demanded. In criticising the education system Petronius' characters cannot therefore be seen as attacking the government, so he was free to criticise it and its products, without any fear of repercussions.

Such then was the educational and literary background against which the *Satyricon* must be set. The education system was an easy target, but perhaps one can also look at a target in the literary sphere. I have already noted Walsh's reference to 'a city of tragic versifiers', and Rudich's to the contemporary 'drive to perform in public'; when all kinds of people, including knights, senators and poets gave public performances. Walsh (1968,208) also suggests that the two long poems in the *Satyricon* play a part in the characterisation of the poet who declaims them, and that thus Eumolpus, and his like, was being satirised. I feel considerable sympathy with that view and with the further comment (209) that the capture of Troy was possibly the most hackneyed of the many hackneyed themes of Roman tragedians who jostled with each other in the streets of Rome 'to declaim their tragic lays'. Walsh rightly notes that the two long poems are consonant with the general tenor of the work, as well as being 'indices

of Eumolpus' character'. However, while they depict that 'deranged and all too facile versifier', they are not to be taken as serious attempts 'to outshine Seneca'; or indeed Lucan. For just as Rome was thronged with hopeful tragedians ready to declaim their works at any opportunity, so there may have been a corresponding group of epicists.

Within memory there had been Cornelius Severus and Albinovanus Pedio as well as Lucan, and indeed Nero himself. Silius Italicus was around the court at that time, and may have been composing the *Ilias Latina*, thought by some to be his, or possibly by a contemporary, Baebius Italicus. It is perfectly possible that Petronius may have made some reference to their lost works in his poem, as well as probably to Lucan's; we shall presumably never know.

So, while Petronius could hardly have openly parodied Nero's poem, there was enough epic around, some of it probably of dubious merit, to direct protest, and fun, at its practitioners, as well as at those in the field of tragedy. The knowing might have seen a pointer towards Nero. Perhaps again it is possible to see Petronius' *dissimulatio* at work as he covers any criticism of Nero in his making fun of his possibly even less successful poetical contemporaries: those who personified the faults railed against by Tacitus, Persius and Longinus. The two long poems thus may well have been part of Petronius' protest at the current educational system and its products

in the literary field, with their failings in tragedy, epic and indeed other literary genres. They were also possibly protests against those who were all too willing to display their talents, or lack of them, in this field. It would have struck a chord with Petronius' audience.

4. *'SATURA QUIDEM TOTA NOSTRA EST'*

The range of situations, incidents and persons described by Petronius is immense. In that respect it reflects the Roman description of *satura* as indicated in Quintilian, X,1,93-95; and by Diomedes, the grammarian quoted by Coffey (1976,9). The exact definition of *satura* is disputed, but the idea of a wide range and mixture seems dominant. Certainly that is shown in the range of topics treated by its first exponents, Ennius and Lucilius; and continued by later writers Horace and Persius. In his *Satires*, 1,30ff. the latter attacks the falsity and affectation of contemporary verse; this decadence in literary tastes is linked to decadence in morals, reflected in part by his near contemporary Petronius (1-5). So on top of the range of topics there was attack on the various faults and foibles of contemporary groups, institutions and individuals: what moderns regard as the normal field of satire.

Ennius in his *Saturae* (III,1) describes his verses as *flammeos* and *medullitus*. Lucilius ('Loeb' - *Remains of Old Latin*, 1148-1151) attacks local rulers as Petronius does: 'They devote themselves to one and the same occupation and craft - to cheat with the maximum cunning.' Horace (*Satires*, I,10,7-15) observes: 'It is not enough to make your listener bare his teeth in a grin.... You need a style that is sometimes severe, sometimes gay, now suiting the style of an orator or a poet, now that of a clever talker.... Humour is often stronger and more

effective than sharpness in cutting knotty issues.'

Rudd (1986,12) notes, however, that Horace does not aspire 'to anything so pompous as "reforming society". All his homilies could do was to sharpen the reader's moral awareness, and (who knows?) that might eventually modify his conduct.' On the other hand Witke (1970,2) feels that satire's main aim is instruction rather than amusement: to transmit ethical insights which the audience is expected to implement in its daily life. As I shall argue, Petronius' main aim seems to be amusement, so perhaps he is tending rather to fulfil Rudd's view.

Persius begins his first satire with: 'Ah, the obsessions of men! What an empty world we live in! Who will read this?' Petronius, who may well have been familiar with at least some of the above quotations, thus fulfils some of the tenets of his satirical predecessors. Like Ennius he would seem to be capable of 'fiery' words; for instance in Agamemnon's attack on parents in 4. Note too in 49: 'I was stiff and stern as could be; I could not restrain myself;' and Encolpius launches into a verbal attack on the servant. However, his strictness ends in his appearing a fool; his fierceness becomes a cause for laughter. As in Lucilius, the local rulers are attacked, but the attack is in the mouth of the freedman Ganymede, who seems no better than his targets and is himself a target of Petronius' satire.

Petronius indeed also shows at least some of the attributes required by Horace in *Satires*, I,10. 'Humour'

rather than 'sharpness' seems behind whatever attacks Petronius does make. Again that is reflected in 132,15, but also in his attacks on others. At no point does he make violent criticism of Trimalchio and his like or of Eumolpus and his. If one insists that he was attacking Nero, Seneca or Lucan, then he did it with humour or *dissimulatio*, but not with open fire. Like Persius, Petronius may have felt doubts about the world that he lived in, and the literary tastes of its inhabitants; he may have been concerned about the numbers of his readership. However, the criticism of literary taste is put in the mouths of the feckless Encolpius (1-3) and the outrageous Eumolpus (83; 115) - characters to laugh at rather than trust.

Finally, though Petronius may eschew the fiery invective of Juvenal, he would seem to have the same ideas as he about the content of a satirical work: 'All the doings of mankind - their vows, their fears, their angers and their pleasures, their goings to and fro - shall form the motley subject of my page' (*Satires*, I,85-86). All these are found in the *Satyricon* in one way or another, though whether it amounts to Juvenal's *farrago* is less certain; but at least the idea of a medley is there in Petronius. Note too Juvenal's opening to his first satire: 'Am I to be a listener all my days? Am I never to get my word in - I that have been so bored by the *Theseid* of the ranting Cordus?' Petronius may have had to be a listener, for he possibly had to put up with the same

problems as Juvenal complains of; but he appears to have made his protest in a different way, if indeed it is really he that is speaking in 132,15.

So Petronius could attack and amuse, use all the styles and genres and treat all subjects. If he did attack, he did it with a smile. Perhaps his target was the object of his comment, apparently misplaced at the end of 132: 'There is nothing more insincere than people's silly persuasions, or more silly than their sham morality.' Compare: 'Nothing is sillier than a silly smile' (Catullus, 39,16). Like Catullus and Horace, Petronius liked to poke fun at people's faults and failings, but in a Horatian rather than a Juvenalian manner.

Attacking society and individuals had of course begun with the Greeks; it was the medley idea that was peculiarly Roman, as Quintilian seems to imply. Certainly in the *Satyricon* there is a vast and varied number of incidents and people. Consider even the main characters apart from the three 'heroes': Agamemnon, Quartilla, Trimalchio and Habinnas with their wives and freedmen friends, Eumolpus, Lichas, Tryphaena, Chrysis, Circe. All are very different, all have fun poked at them. If indeed the extant work is a representative fraction of the whole, the range of 'major' characters must have been very large, the 'minor' ones almost innumerable. Similarly, the range of topics treated in the extant portion - education, art, poets and poetry, sport etc. - if repeated over the whole

work, must have been very considerable; and there are also the sexual adventures, a dinner, a shipwreck, impersonations and many other incidents. Thus the Roman idea of a medley certainly applies to the work. Moreover, these people and situations have fun and sometimes apparent criticism directed at them. The problem is perhaps the depth of feeling that Petronius may have applied to that, and indeed whether such feeling as is expressed is his own.

It is notable too that the satirists mentioned above all wrote in verse. Petronius too employed verse, but his work is mainly in prose. It would also seem to have been considerably longer than any of the works of the verse satirists. This mixture of prose and verse satire seems to have started with the work of the Greek Menippus in the third century BC. Coffey (1976,186-189) notes the attributes of Menippean satire as being: a) first person narrative; b) social comment and literary theme in the prose parts; c) verse insertions of varied length - all very applicable to Petronius. The Papyrus P3010 seems to give a later example of this.

N. Slater notes (1990,18) that modern scholars have wondered whether the *Satyricon* was 'a Menippean satire, a comic novel, or something else again.' The range of the work suggests that, while it may contain elements of the first two, the last is the more likely. There is no reason why the whole could not have been written in verse, other than the poet's ability to sustain that. The poems

in the work are in a variety of styles and metres, and perhaps Petronius felt that that was sufficient to show his abilities in the poetic field, while leaving the 'historical narrative' in its more natural milieu - prose.

I have noted that the targets of Petronius' fun and apparent attacks are many and varied, but also that they are often those criticised over the ages, though with little real effect. Yet perhaps there is more than that. I have noted that two of the main characters, Trimalchio and Eumolpus - respectively the uncouth parvenu and the pedantic versifier - were not unknown as targets of attack from Roman satirists and others. It is of couse not unusual for satirists to make such characters larger than life. Yet these two seem to bulk unusually large, sometimes reducing the 'heroes' to mere onlookers and commentators. I have the feeling that Petronius is singling them out, and the groups they represent, for particular ridicule. (One must also wonder who was singled out for attack in any other such episodes in the lost portion of the work.) There is also a hint that these two were more Roman than the other common butts of attack through the ages, and that they were currently particular targets. Trimalchio was a parvenu, but he was also a freedman, a group under distinct suspicion in certain quarters at that time. Eumolpus, also apparently representative of a current nuisance, waxes particularly lyrical in describing two events important in Rome's history - the Fall of Troy, as also described by her

greatest poet, Vergil; and the Civil War, as also described by the upstart modern, Lucan. So these parts of Petronius' work, apart from following the idea of medley, also had peculiarly Roman overtones.

Thus Petronius was perhaps appealing to a contemporary Roman audience, who would be well aware of these targets, as well as the more universal ones. It must also be remembered that a Roman audience would put a particularly Roman slant even upon factors which were not exclusively Roman in nature, such as the standing of the educational and medical professions. Added factors would be Petronius' allusions to, and reflections of the arena and the theatre, particularly the mime. They were all very much part of the medley of Roman life, of Roman satire, and of Petronius' work.

5. PETRONIUS AS A SENSATIONALIST - Historical Background

a) A Life of Entertainment

Petronius' initial hearers were probably his fellow courtiers. They no doubt had various interests in life, but they and many other Romans would seem to have had plenty of time for amusement. Amusement in Rome could take many forms, but much of it would be centred in the places of public entertainment: the theatre, circus and arena, and to some extent the baths. These various places have been noted above as points of contact between the emperor and the people at large; being used by the latter to voice popular protest at government failings, usually in the social rather than the political field; and by the former to indulge the populace at large and gain their support for his rule.

At times the patricians who may have formed Petronius' initial audience may have felt caught in the middle, but there is no evidence to suggest that they boycotted such places of entertainment. W. Slater points out, in *Roman Theater and Society* (1996,vi), that in *pro Sestio*, 116, Cicero remarked *theatrum populusque Romanus* 'only half in jest,' for the theatre was 'a powerful clearing house for the emotions of the Roman people.' The same was probably true to some extent of the other places of entertainment. That entertainment was an important part in the lives of perhaps the majority of the populace of Rome. Many menial tasks were done by slaves, who thus allowed those who would otherwise have done such tasks to have more free

time. The urban plebs often had little enough work available to them anyway. Therefore very many had free time to attend places of entertainment; even slaves found time to attend. Thus anyone wishing to appeal to the interests of perhaps the majority of Romans might well feel that he had to provide entertainment and/or make use of the devices of popular entertainment in that appeal. For it was the same sets of people going to the circus, arena or theatre. Representatives of any or all of these might read Petronius' novel, so entertainment in the widest sense was a desirable factor in the work. By achieving that, Petronius could be reasonably sure of touching a chord in virtually all of his audience, however wide or narrow it may have been.

However, other facets of life under Nero may have induced Petronius to indulge in *dissimulatio*. For, while the plebs may have found much to delight them in the emperor and his behaviour, the patricians may have seemed to themselves to be walking an uneasy tightrope: either living in total obscurity; or taking a prominent part in public and/or literary life and risking offence to the emperor thereby.

Petronius may have wanted fame and popularity for his work, and could safely have indulged any 'groundlings' who may have read it, with their interest in the games and the mime; but, if he wished to say something more pointed about life at that time, then *dissimulatio* of some kind might have been necessary. I would here reiterate

Rudich's points (1997,190) that it is doubtful whether Petronius was Nero's genuine friend, and that we should not be surprised at the amount of 'imposture and dissimulation' in the *Satyricon*. These attributes of course are connected with drama in general, and the mime in particular, so perhaps it is not surprising that Petronius interested himself in the latter.

Of course what is written in the novels of a particular era does not always accurately reflect the life of that time, but on this occasion the aura of the time and that of the plot seem to coincide. While Petronius may have had to be careful about what he said on occasions, he seems to have managed that without spoiling his novel's entertainment value. It is now necessary to examine what else he would have to do to entertain the public, apart from protesting at hackneyed themes; and the problems which he may have had in doing so.

Anyone wishing to entertain the public in the mid first century had certain problems. As the public were avidly interested in all forms of entertainment, competition for its attention in that sphere was no new thing. For instance, in 165 BC, Terence had problems in getting an audience for his comedy *Hecyra* because of the opposing attraction of a ropedancer, and had to postpone its performance. By Petronius' time, however, the theatre had come to have a stronger hold on the public's attention. It was not perhaps the *fabulae palliatae* of Plautus and Terence that held their attention, nor indeed

the more boisterous Atellan farce, as much as the mime, with its farcical and obscene humour, and the pantomime. While these had started up largely as appendages to a performance of conventional drama, they gradually ousted both tragedy and comedy from the stage.

Of course the attractions of the circus and arena were also very strong. The former with its excitement and colour, and betting, was naturally attractive to large numbers. The arena with its various kinds of fights between individuals and groups had also taken a strong hold on the interest of many people from the emperor downwards. In *Epistle* 7 Seneca deprecates the sort of people who attend the games, without giving any indication that he stayed away from them. Was the pull of the circus and arena stronger then than at any other time, thus forcing Petronius, and others, into making their work more sensationalist than it might otherwise have been, in order to attract attention?

Cicero (*Tusc.*, 2,41) shows that, while the games seemed *crudele et inhumanum* to some, they were popular enough then; and they continued to be so long after Petronius. Seneca's *Epistle* 7 makes it clear, however, that the games were extremely popular in the mid first century AD, and that the cruelty and savagery of the participants, the ingenuity of the promoters and the enthusiasm of the spectators appear to have been reaching new heights. Likewise the circus events appear to have been running into their greatest days under the patronage

of the emperors, with successful participants becoming rich and famous.

However, perhaps the biggest change was in the theatre, as explained above. One must wonder whether Seneca's tragedies were a riposte to that trend, and an effort to show that tragedy could still be 'attractive'. At any rate, by the middle of the century the mime was very much on its way to holding the centre stage. Yet the Atellan farce had not dropped out completely, as is clear in 53,13, though Trimalchio prefers the group of Greek comic players which he had in the past, and which he perhaps no longer has.

By about 50 AD therefore, interest in the three main types of entertainment in the circus, arena and theatre, seems to have increased coincidentally to a new high in each case; with every effort being made to attract even more spectators. Bartsch (1994,193) points to the all pervasiveness of the 'theatrical' in life under Nero. Quinn also (1982,166) provides food for thought in this matter, when he asks what place there is for literature in a large materialistic society. 'The answer seems to be those forms of literature can continue to flourish which can be appreciated by an audience which only partly understands, but where the writer is kept on his toes by having to face as well the informed, discerning appreciation of an inner audience forming a significant minority.' However, recognition depends on a popular audience which can but imperfectly understand what the

writer is trying to say or achieve.

All that is of course a generalisation, but it does encapsulate well what I have been trying to say. Surely Petronius can fit well into such a situation. He has two levels of thought, or plot, aimed at two different types of audience: not quite *dissimulatio*, but getting towards it. Williams (1978,286) tends to support that view when he says that one of the major factors of literary success at the time of Petronius was 'a subject matter which was capable of engaging both the intellect and the emotions at the same time.' Of course every individual has both intellect and emotions to some degree; it is the wide distinctions in these respects between groups or individuals which cause the variety that the author has to address. Petronius seems to have been successful at addressing more than one level, and at exercising the intellect and the emotions. His many reflections of other writers would certainly exercise the former, while the adventures of the three could arouse laughter, pity, contempt and even other emotions. It was against all of the above background that Petronius was writing; and to gain the attention of readers he had to set out his own stall of attractions.

b) Popular Entertainment and Freedom

Petronius' methods of entertainment are of course revealed only in his work. I shall now look at these, and also contrast them and the freedom they show with the factors that inhibited his displays of protest.

In Petronius' time people would be used to bloodshed, violence and excitement in the arena and circus; and the *Satyricon* is not devoid of these, though they play a lesser part in it. For instance, in 1 and 2 Encolpius rages on about the rhetoricians and their debates on subjects such as 'tyrants writing edicts to cut off their fathers' heads, yes, and oracles in time of pestilence demanding the blood of three maidens or more.' Here perhaps Petronius is using colourful, bloodthirsty terms for rhetorical effect, but it does set a tone. Again the language could be taken as part of Petronius' attack on contemporary education, when he would also feel free to protest.

Certainly mention is made of the shows throughout. For instance, in 9 Ascyltus accuses Encolpius of being a *gladiator obscene*; a possible reading *meridiana* would imply that he was one of those mentioned with disdain by Seneca in *Epistle* 7. In 45 Echion talks a lot about gladiator shows both good and bad, about various types of gladiators successful and unsuccessful, and about show promoters generous and otherwise. He was clearly a fanatic for the shows. Petronius may well be characterising, through Echion, the kind of out and out

fanatic that there probably was around, and making fun of, or protesting at such. Trimalchio himself had portraits of the noted gladiators Hermeros and Petraites on his cups (52), and wanted the fights of the latter depicted on his tomb (71). His pictures included ones depicting the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and a gladiator show (29).

In 117 Encolpius and his friends take an oath as members of Eumolpus' troupe 'like regular gladiators,' and 'to endure burning, flogging, death by the sword, or anything else that Eumolpus ordered.' The type of men some women chase after are detailed in 126,1: 'a gladiator, or a muleteer smothered in dust, or an actor disgraced by exhibiting himself on the stage.' Whether Petronius was making a personal comment here is unknown, but gladiators and actors seem to have been popular in certain quarters, while disdained in others. At any rate, there is enough mention of gladiators and their activities in the *Satyricon* to show that such were in the minds of people of that day, and thus in the minds of Petronius' readers.

There is relatively less mention of the chariot races in the *Satyricon*, though the lost parts of the work may have remedied that. In 70 Philargyrus is mentioned as a supporter of the Green faction, one indeed who is prepared to challenge his master to a bet on the Greens. The four racing companies aroused great interest in the population, including the emperors; Nero was a fanatic and seems to have been a supporter of the Greens (Suetonius, *Nero*, 22).

Thus a mention of the races in literature would have been sure to arouse a reaction, favourable or otherwise; but it could normally have been made without real danger.

More general violence and bloodshed is apparent in the work. For instance, in 74 Fortunata provokes Trimalchio into throwing a cup at her face, apparently injuring her. This violence leaves Trimalchio unconcerned: he launches into a long rhetorical piece, with coloured language, against her. While it may be meant to show Trimalchio's annoyance, the whole scene, with its language, seems rather sensationalist.

In 95-96 Eumolpus gets involved in a brawl, much to the delight of Encolpius, who shows a distinct lack of concern, even some sadism towards him; though even this violence is tempered by humour. For throughout this 'battle' scene the language is that of mockery: *fit concursus familiae hospitumque ebriorum. fit concursus/frequentia* occurs often enough in descriptions of battle, as in Vergil, but here it is not an assembly of heroes or warriors, but of slaves and drunks. They did not attack Eumolpus with firebrands or spears, but *veru extis stridentibus* and *furca de carnario rapta*. Bargates did not gallop up on a charger to put things right, but had to be carried up on a sedan chair because of his sore feet. His 'battle speech' was not to rouse an army of professional soldiers, but *rabiosa barbaraque voce in ebrios fugitivosque peroravit*. The lady warrior in the scene was not an Amazon or a Camilla, but an old hag on

soleis ligneis imparibus and with a big dog; against which Eumolpus defended himself, not with a flashing blade, but *candelabro*. He also strikes with *palma excussissima* - the superlative giving ridiculous point to a futile gesture. It is all the language of ridicule. Such situations and characters are not meant to be taken seriously; like the characters of mime, they disappear when the curtain is raised.

The frailty of the characters is again seen in the 'battle' in 108. Eumolpus tried to thwart the sailors' threats *non solum voce sed etiam manibus*. As in 95 there was no crowd of warriors, but *mercennarius comes et unus uterque infirmissimus vector*. Note again the weakening and ridiculous effect of the superlative, emphasised by their being *solacia magis litis quam virium auxilia*. Encolpius declares that he shirked nothing; he would show his power. So he shook his fist at Tryphaena - again hardly a typical lady warrior - and vowed violence on her if she did not stop hurting Giton. In this furious quarrel between just about all the characters, 'Many fell on both sides, still more got bloody wounds and retired in the style of a real battle.' However, the fight is brought to an end by Giton threatening to castrate himself and a mock peace is made up. So, when the 'heroes' try to be strong, they are shown to be weak and ridiculous. All the echoes of the battleground and the arena may be there, but the words and actions are shown to be those of farce.

In 136 Encolpius has a battle with three geese and

ends up by killing one of them. The fact that it was a goose of Priapus may have had something to do with the underlying plot of the work as a whole, but here it seems merely a bizarre incident with sexual connections. Again no one seems to be seriously hurt, apart of course from the goose.

In 132 Encolpius is whipped and spat upon and thrown out of doors; and in 134 he receives another beating, at the hands of a woman, possibly Proselenos - the text is defective. Again this violence seems to have sexual connotations, which makes it a little different from the whippings etc. administered in the arena. There may also be connections with mystery religions; but it is still violence. In 105 there are lesser whippings, this time with religious connotations.

Sullivan (1968 [1],250) notes that the scenes of violence with beatings 'bulk curiously large' in the extant work. While I would not go that far, I would agree with him that there is no loving lingering over these incidents which have 'nothing in common with modern "hard-core pornography"', with its aim of pandering to or exciting such interests in its readers. As I have noted, the whippings may have had less to do with sadism as such than with religion, particularly the mystery variety which was gaining many converts at Rome at that time. It should be noted that the 'mystery' in such religions lay in their basic tenets rather than with their social status; everyone seemed to know about them.

Another display of violence can be found in 46 with Echion's description of how he killed his son's goldfinches and put the blame on a weasel. Nowadays such behaviour would be rightly condemned, but one must wonder how many Romans would have disapproved of it. Certainly it received no comment from Echion's fellow guests, though it does remain as a reflection of the violent outlook of the age.

Barton (1993,43) notes that Petronius bears witness to a popular obsession with the grand sacrificial gestures of such past aristocratic heroes as the Decii, Horatius, Cato the Younger etc. when he has their sacrifices imitated by the 'vagabonds', as in 80, 98 and 108. She notes too (59) that the Romans created in their minds or worlds 'the terrible suffering that was their pleasure. They were both victims and victimisers.' So, when Trimalchio acts out and mourns his own funeral (71-72, 77-78), he is 'both the observer and the observed,' like the condemned criminal whose rendering in the arena of the role of Mucius Scaevola awed Martial (VIII,30). I suspect that Petronius may have intended his potential audience to regard Trimalchio in that way.

It would seem that, while there are a number of violent incidents in the *Satyricon*, these are not without humour, or sexual, bizarre or religious connotations. If Petronius did feel that he had to reflect the entertainment of the times with some violence in his work, he toned it down with the other factors mentioned. The

bizarre in fact plays quite a part in the work. From the earliest times the Romans seem to have had an interest in the unusual, the outlandish or the apparently supernatural, in both actual events and in stories. Livy's *History*, particularly the earlier books, shows that. The advent of the mystery religions from the East in the first century AD may have heightened that interest, just about the time that Petronius was writing; and his work seems to reflect that to some extent.

The mystery element is revealed in 17-18 in the Quartilla incident, where she asks the trio not to laugh at 'our nocturnal worship' of Priapus, nor 'the immortal mystery'. The whippings in 132 and 134 have already been noted. Romans also seem to have been interested in astrology and horoscopes. Trimalchio certainly was, for on his doorway 'Lucky and unlucky days were marked too with distinctive knobs' (30). In 35,1 there is a lengthy description of a dish which Trimalchio has brought in. On it was carved the 'twelve signs of the Zodiac' and various associated accoutrements. Trimalchio was probably showing off his wealth at this point, but it did show the importance of astrology to him. Indeed in 39 he gives a long exposition on the subject, with descriptions of people born under the various signs. Some of these descriptions may seem odd to us; but perhaps Petronius is showing his wit and humour at the expense of Trimalchio, and possibly others who might have been considered over zealous in that field. Trimalchio even attributed much of

his success to an astrologer, Serapa, who gave him advice and encouragement at a critical time (77,1). There is little other mention of astrology in the extant work, so perhaps Trimalchio and his kind are indeed being mocked by Petronius.

However, there were many Romans interested in astrology, and the fact that it did occupy some position in the *Cena* means that Petronius was prepared to reflect that interest. Walsh (1970,26) also makes the point that characterising Trimalchio as an astrologer could owe something to the themes of the popular stage; 'several literary mimes are named after signs of the zodiac.' Thus even the astrological or mystery element may have a tie in with entertainment. Moreover, such an element has occupied people's interest to a greater or lesser degree through the ages.

The bizarre is manifested in various forms in the *Satyricon*. For instance there is the behaviour of Habinnas in 66, with the meal of bear meat, and Scintilla's subsequent vomiting; and there is a humorous mention of cannibalism in 141. Much of the odd, however, centres on three stories. In the first (61-62) Niceros tells the 'werewolf' story, with its associations with witchcraft. This is followed (63) by Trimalchio himself telling of an incident involving the Cappadocian witches. Finally (111-112) Eumolpus tells the lengthy tale of the Widow of Ephesus. These stories were not original to Petronius, being examples of Milesian tales, of the type

originally composed or collected by Aristides of Miletus in the second century BC. They are thought to have been generally licentious in character, though the examples in the *Satyricon* are not notably so. However, they were very popular in Rome, and Petronius was probably reflecting popular taste in his retelling, and possible reworking of them. Williams (1978,180) also points out that the mentions of astrology, werewolves and witches, and indeed bloodthirstiness, were, as often in Petronius, 'a good guide to the fads and fancies of his own age.' He therefore could feel free to pander to these 'fads and fancies' for the general entertainment of his readers.

The witchcraft that featured in two of the above tales is found elsewhere in the work. There is a hint of it in 7 in the old woman whom Encolpius asks for directions. He thought her *divinam,* though he was soon to revise that opinion. It may be that this is a reference to the gods that Ovid invokes in the *Fasti* to lead him around Rome with its temples and festivals: Janus (I,101), Mars (III,1) and Venus (IV,1).

Another old woman, Proselenos, features in 134; where she says to Encolpius, 'What screech owls [witches] have eaten your nerve away?' However, if she is the subject of the next paragraph, she shows herself to be a bit of a witch herself in the thrashing incident with its sexual connotations. The priestess of Priapus, Oenothea, also shows herself to be an exponent in that field, particularly in the poem which she recites in the same

chapter. She again reveals her powers in 137, both as witch and prophetess. Interest in witchcraft therefore is not confined to the *Cena*. Again such an interest was not confined to Romans, though Petronius was probably reflecting their interest. Note too that witchcraft and mystery religion also feature in the other great Roman novel, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. So such matters continued to interest some Romans, and indeed many others since.

In the *Satyricon*, many of the scenes involving witchcraft and other bizarre behaviour have sexual connotations. There are also other scenes in the work which may be classified as bizarre, but which involve more overt connections with sexuality and obscenity; and it is to these latter that attention must now be turned.

Though the sexual element plays such a notable part in the *Satyricon*, it has received relatively little attention from commentators. The *Cena* episode, which engages many commentators' attention, has relatively little 'sexual' content. Yet, important as it is, it occupies less than half of the extant work. Perhaps the sexual matters in the *Satyricon* are regarded as less controversial compared to other areas of scholarship; perhaps in the past they were thought not to be the province of a dignified and intelligent academic. It may also be that the latter case was why there was no comment on the *Satyricon* for three hundred years after it was written, and even for some time thereafter comment was mainly on grammatical and other linguistic points. I am not proposing to remedy that lack

to any great extent, but some comment must be made.

N. Slater (1990,40) makes a valuable point. He is speaking of the Quartilla incident, but his remarks have general application. 'These scenes are not pornographic. If they were intended to rouse the reader sexually, they would be largely a failure as such. Pornography portrays prodigious sexual success, not impotence and failure,' as exemplified by Encolpius. Nor should the work be seen as 'designed for sadomasochistic tastes: there is no indication that Encolpius and Ascyltus are aroused by pain, bondage (20,4) or humiliation.' Zeitlin (1971 [2],665-666) makes similar points. Sullivan (1965,19) interestingly points to Judge Woolsey's remarks on Joyce's *Ulysses;* to the effect that 'The few sections to which exception might be taken are "emetic" rather than "aphrodisiac".' Perhaps similar sections in Petronius' work hardly even qualify as 'emetic', but the point should be taken. I think Petronius was trying to make his work entertaining, not disgusting. Even the literally 'emetic' incident of Fortunata vomiting up the bear meat (66) is part of a humorous narration by Habinnas.

Slater also makes a point with regard to the homosexuality that pervades the book (42): 'While Encolpius' attachment to Giton would not be approved by the strictest Roman moralists, neither is it regarded as completely unnatural.... The crudest, but most effective Priapic revenge against them would be anal or oral rape by males in the service of Priapus. Instead we have assaults

perpetrated by women, pathetic homosexuals and possibly eunuchs, all very un-priapic figures.' Baldwin (1973,294-295) indeed plays down the Priapus theme as a recurrent motif for the *Satyricon*: I note half a dozen mentions of Priapus in the extant work, but really no elaboration on them. Sullivan (1968 [1],94) makes the valid point that Petronius, 'like most of his contemporaries, regarded all men as potentially, if not actually, bisexual.' Konstan (1994,120) makes a similar point: 'There is no polarity here of homosexuality and heterosexuality as they are understood today.'

Note also Thomsen's views (1992,69). He thinks that the previously held view that in antiquity homosexuality was always regarded as effeminate ignores 'the distinction between "actif" and "passif" that was so important for the Greeks and Romans themselves.' He quotes (70) Halperin on moderns associating 'sexual object choice' with a 'determinate kind of sexuality', and agrees that it would be a monumental task to enumerate all the ancient documents where the alternative 'boy or woman' occurs in an erotic context as if the two were interchangeable. That would tend to agree with Sullivan. While homosexual and heterosexual scenes each occur in the *Satyricon*, one gets the impression that in it the former is more 'actif' than 'passif'. See also Thomsen on the bridegroom and bride, the perpetrator and the recipient (28-31; 50-55; 165-177). Thus Petronius was probably merely reflecting the situation at his time regarding sexual matters. It

was a topic on which he probably felt safe in speaking comparatively freely; and modern commentators should always bear all that in mind.

Slater also notes that the sexuality in such scenes has a curiously theatrical quality (44). 'Quartilla is not the only audience.... Many others become spectators, ... and to judge by the constant audience reaction (laughter) the performances are perceived as comedy or farce.' I would emphasise too that they are part of the continuous entertainment of the plot, as the first part of 26 implies. I think that, if indeed the sexual scenes are meant for entertainment and/or amusement, this might explain the general lack of success of Encolpius in that field. There is nothing so amusing as someone else's lack of success, particularly in a field where one regards oneself as an outstanding and successful exponent. The recurrence of the theme may indicate some Priapic thread running throughout the work, or it may simply be Petronius feeling that he has to keep his audience amused, and that this field contains a particularly rich mine of amusement. Perhaps he also felt that he had the freedom to mock society's failures and nonentities in a way that he could not mock the successful and the powerful, at least in their own eyes. In Roman times mocking the less fortunate drew less censure than it does today.

One must also emphasise, along with Gill (1973,177), that: 'The distinctively sexual episodes are not divergent, in their style, from the work as a whole.' The

element of the striking and the bizarre is amply provided in the whole choice of sexual combinations available: as in 9-11; 23-26; 126 onwards. Also the mime often had sexuality as a subject, and Slater is right to point to the performances as being 'perceived as comedy or farce'.

He adds (93) that the story of the Pergamene boy (85-87) is 'frankly erotic, if not even pornographic - but that is not its only purpose.' He again stresses the theatricality and role playing of that situation, a circumstance repeated in the poem in 126,18; and in the story of Circe, who regards the failure of Encolpius as a lover in terms of the performance of a role. 'Sexuality is thus placed in a theatrical context.' Slater throughout emphasises the role playing/theatrical context in the sexual scenes, and indeed the work as a whole. Panayotakis (1995,92) does much the same, particularly with regard to the mime.

Sullivan (1968 [1],226) supports the idea that the work is not pornographic in the full sense, but does make use of 'conventionally obscene subjects'. There is indeed 'no loving lingering' over the various incidents, and the treatment is 'brief and witty' (25); with nothing in common with modern 'hard core' pornography, where the treatment is, if anything, the opposite. Sullivan rightly notes that the open acceptance of the physical side of life by the Greeks and Romans was only occasionally checked by religious and social taboos. He cautions: 'There was not the systematic fear and suspicion of sex

per se such as we find in most forms of Christianity, and which have made its representation in our culture almost as disreputable (until recently) as the reality.' Certainly that should be borne in mind as much when reading Petronius as, say, Aristophanes, or indeed Joyce. It may again be a factor in the 'disappearance' of Petronius for three centuries. At any rate it is clear that there would be relatively few restrictions on what Petronius wrote in this field.

Rudich (1997,210) observes that 'The esthetic of cruelty and horror is characteristic of Silver Age Latin literature. One suspects that the entire atmosphere at Nero's court was conducive to this.' Was Petronius pandering to that very audience? Rudich, however, notes Petronius' treatment of sadomasochism: 'In a series of hilarious scenes it is satirized with verve and, furthermore, it is depicted as a perversion; .... instead of arriving at sexual arousal as a result of pain and humiliation, the personages of the novel culminate in failure and impotence.' There is, I feel, the idea that the sexual scenes in the novel are not for the reader's sexual gratification, but more for his amusement at the failure of the hero in that field.

Walsh (1970,106) follows much the same line, finding the Circe scenes the most scabrous and most literary episode of the work; and also noting that the theme of a high born lady seeking sexual gratification from a slave also appeared in the mime. He states (26) that the

'controlling theme' of the novel was the anger of Priapus, another character from the mimic stage. While I feel that we have too little of the work to be sure about the 'controlling theme', there is enough mention of Priapus to remind the reader of that mimic figure.

Richlin (1980,194) points out that the women of the *Satyricon* form a series of stereotypes common in Roman satire, and some, if not all, may have featured in the mime. Certainly all seemed to enervate or nonplus Eumolpus, which would seem to be a feature of Petronian humour that would appeal to an audience.

Thus there seems to be a consensus among commentators that the work of Petronius, though *prima facie* sexual and obscene, does not effect any undue sexual arousal in the reader, but is merely aimed at amusing him/her in the same way that certain theatrical performances, especially the mime, would do. Also, there may then have been no definite concept of what constituted 'pornography' anyway. Some literature may have upset or dismayed people, but it did not provoke them to ask for bans on it. Likewise some moderns might regard Seneca's and Lucan's writings as sensationalist, but Romans may have felt differently.

Beare (ed.2, 1964,156) notes that there is evidence that the literary mimes of Syrus and Laberius, in addition to being indecent in subject and language, dealt with 'the traditional mime theme, adultery and vice.' I have considered some facets of that in general terms, and now examine some of these incidents in detail.

The first real sexual encounter is in 11, where Ascyltus comes upon Encolpius playing around with Giton, and lays into him with a strap; flagellation of one kind or another seems to be a feature of the work. Then follows the Quartilla incident, which is disjointed because of lacunae. There is much heterosexuality in the episode, but there are other features which may be put down as bizarre, at least by our standards. In 20,6 there would seem to be some kind of bondage, where the maid ties up the heroes; in 21, in addition to the arrival of the male prostitute, Psyche sticks a hairpin in Encolpius' cheeks, and the girl threatens Ascyltus with a sponge soaked in aphrodisiac. In 22 the maid, rejected by Ascyltus, paints his face and body with some odd substances as he sleeps; a male prostitute appears (or reappears) in 23, and is shown as a strange figure in looks and behaviour; this is followed in 24 by Quartilla spreading her favours around; and a mock wedding with a hint of paedophilia, and more than a hint of voyeurism, in 25 and 26. Thus the Quartilla episode, as well as bringing in the more usual features of homosexual and heterosexual activity, also includes some of the more bizarre fringe activities.

There is really comparatively little in the sexual area that calls for notice in the *Cena*. It may be that there is little opportunity for it in this episode; or that Petronius was merely giving his audience a respite from it, before going on with more sexual adventures. At

any rate, immediately after the *Cena*, in 79-80, there is a quarrel between Encolpius and Ascyltus over Giton, who chooses the latter. Encolpius then muses on his situation with references to homosexuality, paedophilia and cross-dressing. In 85-87, Eumolpus relates his pederastic adventures with the Pergamene boy, while 94-96 produce some bizarre scenes, with Encolpius trying to hang himself, Giton staging a mock suicide, the drunken brawl, and an assault by Encolpius on Giton. Again these scenes amusingly introduce much that is on the fringes of sexual activity.

102 involves the plan of the heroes disguising themselves in various odd ways to escape punishment. Giton delivers a speech in florid and rhetorical style. Again the language and thought seem more sensational than would appear necessary to us, even in such a situation. Is Petronius again trying to use rhetorical language against itself? Perhaps that also explains Encolpius' ravings over the dead Lichas in 115. [*8]

In 105-108, there is more violent action on the ship; perhaps a hint of the *naumachiae* in the flooded arena. At any rate it ends with Giton threatening to castrate himself, and a joke treaty is made up. In order to restore Encolpius and Giton to their former glory, they have to be dressed in women's wigs and their faces made up - perhaps a hint of transvestism. In 126, Circe's maid asks Encolpius, 'What is the object of your nicely combed hair, your face plastered with dyes, and the soft fondness

of your glance, and your walk arranged by art?' She took it that this transvestism meant that he had favours for sale; but any thoughts that he may have had about the maid are put down by her remark that she was not going to lie with a slave; that is for her mistress. Once again the let down for Encolpius is mingled with bizarre behaviour and comic elements.

The Circe episode with Encolpius is of course heterosexual in nature. However, the text is fragmentary, and 128 ends abruptly with a reference to Platonic love. There follows an exchange of amusing love letters between Circe and Encolpius on the theme of his impotence, and he is forced to try to find some cure for it. He first resorts to witchcraft, without any ultimate success; and he is forced to contemplate the reason for his failure and a method of dealing with it - self castration. Though he refrains from this, he directs more abusive, and amusing, remarks towards his penis; finishing by asking for freedom in language, thought and writing. This latter may indicate some of Petronius' thoughts on writing freely on sexual matters when others might want to criticise him. Though of course sexual organs and their proper functioning are a prerequisite for most sexual activity, Petronius treats the problem of impotence in an odd and amusing manner: perhaps in an attempt to escape attack from the censorious.

Rankin (1971,9) notes that the 'stress upon impotence, the anger of Priapus, and the fearsome aspect of sexually

menacing females strike a note of weirdness.' That may be true, but whether Petronius' readers would have regarded it as wholly 'weird' cannot be ascertained. Rankin also notes an element of 'hysteria' in the Circe episode, comparable with that in the 'Circe' episode of Joyce's *Ulysses*. He rightly remarks that, whether or not Petronius had the type of personality that such attributes might suggest, beneath the layers of satire there is a 'visible seam of sympathy for unhappiness', and under the picaresque a 'regard for honesty'. Again I would agree that there is no reason to believe that Petronius was as immoral as his characters; or that he was any worse or better morally than anyone else; a sentiment endorsed by Rankin (26). He also makes the point (90) that Tacitus gives Petronius 'the benefit of the doubt' with regard to any suggestion of moral depravity in his life. Depending on Tacitus' sources, that may indicate that Petronius' contemporaries 'did not take him seriously as a profligate.' That is an attractive proposition, but I feel that the evidence is too scanty to say what effect Petronius had on his contemporaries.

133 contains a poem to Priapus whose temple Encolpius had apparently profaned. He promises to sacrifice to the god, but then the hapless fellow unwittingly kills a goose sacred to the god in a mock battle scene, not devoid of humour. In between, Encolpius has more trouble with his impotence: 'He's got a wet leather, not a prick' (134). Oenothea resorts to witchcraft to try to cure him, while

making sure that 'She lay over the bed, and kissed me once, twice' (135.1). The witchcraft consists of various strange rites, which again might attract those interested in mystery religions. In an effort to expiate the crime of killing the goose more witchcraft follows, again including such as: 'Oenothea, drawing out a leathern prick, dipped it in a medley of oil, small pepper, and the bruised seed of nettles, and proceeded by degrees to direct its passage through my hinder parts,' and so on (138.1). The text has begun to get very fragmentary at this point, but in 140 there is yet another bizarre scene where Eumolpus, Corax and a girl make love in some peculiar ways and positions, 'amid huge laughter': while the girl's brother indulges in voyeurism - more bizarre behaviour, more amusement.

On the sexual connection, Rose (1967) sees Petronius expressing two levels of 'reality' through Encolpius (131): 'events as Encolpius *interprets* them, and the actual events to show how faithless Giton really is.' He quotes examples of this in 9,4; 79-80; 91,7; 98,7-9; 133,2. While I am not wholly convinced by all these examples, for it is difficult to separate the two types at times, it may yet be another hint that Petronius is writing on two levels.

George (1966) looks closely at Giton, noting that his style is 'intensely literary.... Giton has read all the prescribed books (339).... Rhetoric is a feature of Giton's style;' more specifically it is declamatory

(341). George quotes examples of this in 80,4; 91,2; 98,8; 102,14. He thinks, however, that it is '*bad* rhetoric' (341); and claims (343): 'In the rhetorical passages it is the *content* which decides the style. We can ignore the *character* of Giton and concentrate on his *function*.' I would agree with George that Giton's character seems elusive. It seems to me that his main function is to provide an apparently constant link in the narrative; a sexual link indeed that is also continued by the other constant, Encolpius.

Of him, George notes that whenever he meets a slightly stronger character, 'he immediately becomes quite submissive and suggestible' (349). George quotes instances that include his flattery of Agamemnon; submission to Quartilla over the remedy for fever; admiration of Trimalchio's house; failure to stand up to Ascyltus and Giton; buckling under to the soldier; offering himself to Eumolpus' advances. 'In short, he is, in the broadest sense, suffering from psychological impotence. Again, like Giton, he is a compound of literary sophistication (though not good taste) and practical naiveté' (349). In this connection he quotes 81; 100; 115; 132.

All that may be largely true, for Encolpius does seem to buckle under pressure, but again I think it is more important to concentrate on the actions and functions of Encolpius rather than his character. His actions may well reflect his character, but their function is again to

provide a continuity, largely a sexual one, for a long narrative. Perhaps he is a reflection of the *scurra*, which provided the subject for a monograph by Corbett (1986). Encolpius is indeed the man about town or dandy, but also the buffoon. As such, he could be connected with the mime. Corbett (66) noted that the *scurra* shared an ancestry with the *mimus* and the *circulator;* in connection with which last note Habinnas' slave in 68,6-7. Moreover, it seems certain that performances of mime contained much 'knock about farce', and the mimic skills of the players were enhanced by 'clownish antics' (57). Certainly I feel that much of Encolpius' adventure includes 'knock about farce' and 'clownish antics'; thus continuing the connection with the mime, and underlining the importance of his actions and functions for the plot.

While there is much homosexual and heterosexual action in the *Satyricon* which might be a reflection of an audience's interest in such matters, there is also much on the many and varied fringe features of sexual life; and on the failures of Encolpius in the sexual arena. I have noted that in many incidences of such in the *Satyricon* bizarre behaviour was involved, and humour in addition, when Petronius was possibly indulging the Romans' interest in the bizarre and unusual in life in general; and in sexual behaviour, including the narrator's failures in that respect, he still finds opportunities to entertain and amuse. It would certainly fit in with conceptions of him as a sensational writer, but one with a distinct aim

in view.

Petronius wanted to entertain. As has been seen in the section 'A Life of Fear', he was restricted in that. However, when he came to deal with the stock figures of criticism (the educators, the lawyers and the freedmen), and with society's failures (Encolpius and his companions), he was free to write much as he liked, in his quest to entertain. Contemporary public entertainment was sensational, and Petronius appears to have felt free to be likewise in his writings.

6. PETRONIUS AS A SENSATIONALIST - Literary Background

a) Others' Literary Sensationalism

If sensationalism in public entertainment had such an effect on Petronius, it would be reasonable to ask if any other writers of the time were similarly affected; and with whose work Petronius' may be compared.

Petronius indeed was not alone in that period in producing sensationalist writing; his work overlapped in time on the writings of Seneca the Younger and of Lucan, Seneca's nephew. Indeed all three produced writings that were, at least in part, sensationalist in nature; Seneca did so in his tragedies, Lucan in his *Pharsalia*. In the introduction to this work I noted the three main ingredients of sensationalist writing: violence and bloodshed; the outlandish and the bizarre; the sexual and the obscene. I have noted that there is relatively little violence and bloodshed in the extant work of Petronius, and that what there is is mainly set in a frame of humour. However, there was a large amount of the sexual and the obscene, often linked with the bizarre and mysterious.

Looking now at the other two writers - firstly Seneca and his tragedies. There has been considerable controversy about these works, particularly their date. Many have thought that they are early works, mainly because their style and content supposedly reflect the clever immaturity of a young man; and therefore they would be dated about 30 AD. Others have seen alleged

allusions to later events in them, and would date them at least twenty years later. One must remember that, while none of the plays is particularly long, together they form a considerable corpus of work; and their writing may have been spread over some years. At any rate they probably lived on in the memories, and possibly libraries, of Petronius and many of his hearers.

Another controversy is about whether the tragedies were intended for the stage. Generally it has been thought that they were intended for the reader or listener, rather than for performance on the public stage. Some have pointed out, however, that it is possible to perform the plays on stage, though some of the scenes would be difficult, in practical terms, to put on. That may be true, but there is no indication that they were in fact ever produced in a public theatre. Possibly Seneca himself had no intention of putting them on stage; perhaps just as Ibsen announced *Peer Gynt* as 'a play for voices.' Certainly they would seem to have been intended to attract the attention of readers or hearers; this time, at least partly, because of their bloodthirstiness and violence. As with Petronius, we cannot be sure as to the exact type of audience at which Seneca was aiming, but it would certainly be one that was well acquainted with the bloodshed and violence in the arena. Consider the following extracts taken from two of his plays that impinge on the fall of Troy, which is also the subject of Petronius' *Halosis Troiae*:

[CASSANDRA] 'Now Tyndareus in a mad rage snatches a two edged axe and, as at the altar the priest marks with his eye the oxen's necks before he strikes, so, now here, now there her impious hand she aims. He has it! The deed is done! The scarce severed head hangs by a slender part; here blood streams over his headless trunk, there lie his moaning lips.'
(*Agamemnon*, 897ff.)

The above not only reflects the scenes of death with their gory details common in the arena, but it also includes the 'He has it!' [*habet*] cry of the crowd when a gladiator was hit. Now a messenger relates the death of Astyanax in *Troades*, 1110ff.:

'What body
Survives that steep place? His heavy fall smashed
And scattered the bones. That bright form's features,
That face, those noble traces of his sire
Were pulped when his body's weight dropped to earth.
The neck unhinged as it struck the flint rock.
His head split and his brains squeezed out.'
(translated by A.J. Boyle).

Apart from the violence and the gruesome death, the above is also part of a long, highly coloured and rhetorical speech by a messenger, common enough in tragedies, but especially so in Seneca's. It may be this kind of thing that Petronius was attacking in his *Halosis Troiae*, rather than Seneca's work in particular and through it the man himself.

Certainly Seneca's tragedies were coloured by events in the arena. *Epistle* 7,3-5 makes clear his familiarity with the arena: 'I come home more greedy, more ambitious, more voluptuous and even more cruel and inhuman.... By chance I attended a mid-day exhibition, expecting some fun, wit and relaxation.... But it was quite the reverse.... Now all trifling is put aside and it is pure murder.... And when the games stop for the intermission, they announce, "A little throat cutting in the meantime, so that there may still be something going on."'

Despite Seneca's protestation here, there is no indication that he stopped going to the games entirely. However, the passage does show the extent of the cruelty of the shows in the mid first century, and the extent to which the promoters would go to satisfy the spectators; and that is just the type of audience - whether plebeian or patrician, they all attended - that Seneca was trying to attract in his tragedies. So it is little wonder perhaps that his plays reflected the events and bloodshed of the arena; or that Petronius felt compelled to take at least some note of them also. [*9]

Lucan was only 26 when he died in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy of 65. The first three books of the *Pharsalia* were published in 61. The first book contains an amazing eulogy of Nero, but these books do contain some criticism of Julius Caesar and of the concept of empire. However, the remaining books, which may not have been published during Lucan's lifetime, are rather more

critical in these respects. Thus his period of writing activity probably coincided with that of Petronius, and so he may well have faced the same problems; both with regard to publishing comments which might excite official disapproval, or verses which might attract Nero's envy; and in attracting an audience for a literary work at a time when people's attention was attracted by more spectacular entertainment.

Perhaps to achieve this latter, Lucan indulged in descriptions of violence and bloodshed; and he also had a liking for the bizarre that Petronius shared. Lucan too included witchcraft in his descriptions. The most notable incidence of this comes in the *Pharsalia* VI, where Sextus Pompey meets the Thessalian witch, Erictho, who claims, 'When the planets by their shining bear down a single soul to death, witchcraft has the power to interpose a respite; and though all the stars promise a man old age, we cut short his life half-way by our magic herbs' (607-610). She goes on, 'If, however, it is enough for you to learn calamity before it comes, the ways of approaching truth are many.... Since there is such abundance of recent slaughter, ... the mouth of a corpse still warm and freshly slain will speak with substantial utterance' (615ff.). There follows a long and horrifying description of how she does exactly that. It adds only a limited amount to the story and can only have been included for effect, and to inflame the Romans' interest in the bizarre, and in telling the future. The same is also

probably true of many other such descriptions. For instance Book IX is largely given up to Cato's march through Libya, with descriptions of the many strange means of death his men managed to undergo. One brief example from many longer ones will suffice (822-827): 'Behold! a fierce serpent, called by Africa *iaculus*, aimed and hurled itself at Paulus from a barren tree far off; piercing his head and passing through the temples, it escaped. Poison played no part there; death simultaneous with the wound snatched him away. Men discovered how slow was the flight of the bullet from the sling, and how sluggish the whizz of the Scythian arrow through the air.' While all such examples add a certain amount of interest to the story, they seem to me to go on rather too long for that purpose. Their aim may possibly have been to retain the attention of an audience to whom death was an everyday sight in the arena, and often a bizarre death at that. Note too the highly rhetorical comparison in the last sentence quoted; perhaps another product of the schools that were targeted in the *Satyricon*.

While the two examples of the bizarre in Lucan quoted above contain some hints of bloodshed, they are as nothing compared with some of the many, longer examples of it and of violence in the *Pharsalia*. Also from Book VI I quote just one example (175-183): 'His sword cuts off the hands that clutch the battlements, with a stone he crushes one man's head and skull, scattering the brains ill-protected by their brittle covering: he sets fire to the hair and

beard of another, and the flames crackle as the eyes burn. The heap of dead rose until it made the ground level with the wall; and at once he sprang off and hurled himself over the weapons into the centre of the foe, swift as a leopard springs over the points of the spears.' Note the exaggeration of the numbers of dead, and again the rhetorical comparison in the last line. Again this is the kind of thing that Petronius may have been attacking in his *de Bello Civili*. Note too that the description of the split skull bears some resemblance to the death of Astyanax as described by Seneca, above; though there is probably no deliberate copying, despite the kinship between the two poets.

Nor did the sensationalism of violence die out with Lucan. I have mentioned that Silius Italicus may have begun writing at about this time. His work too contains numerous and lengthy bloody and violent scenes, particularly of battles. Battles of course are bloody affairs, but Italicus, like Lucan, seems to dwell lovingly on his descriptions of them in his epic on the Punic Wars: e.g. IV,143-621.

It would seem, then, that among them Seneca, Lucan and Petronius employed all the tricks of sensationalism: bloodshed and violence, the bizarre and the outlandish, the obscene and the sexual; though each had his speciality, as it were. In their resort to this sensationalism it is surely possible that they were trying to attract an audience: one that was well used to seeing

exciting and sensational events, and much human suffering, in the circus and arena; and indeed the theatre, to be dealt with later. Consequently they had to make use of the tricks of the entertainers in these areas to draw attention to their own works. If one is looking for a modern equivalent, perhaps the 'tabloid' press is the closest.

The modern age has much to divert people, with many different and interesting entertainments ready to hand. The argument whether a violent society breeds sensationalist media or literature, or *vice versa*, is of course a difficult one, but it is perhaps irrelevant to my point: that, in the Rome of Seneca, Lucan and Petronius, if writers wanted to attract an audience of more than just the *litterati*, they had to provide the sensational; for a large proportion of their readers, of whatever class, or cultural or educational background, were used to it.

W. Johnson (1987,44) provides some insight into the possible effects of Lucan's work upon his readers, which could probably also be applied to Petronius. He makes the slightly humorous but still valid point about Cato, as depicted by Lucan: 'If I dislike him, ... I nevertheless find myself enjoying him. Is this how Lucan intended his audience to feel about Cato? I am almost prepared to admit to bad taste and frivolous irreverence in chuckling over what seem to me Cato's zany gaucheries, his fantastic excesses.' While I cannot say that I particularly enjoy Cato, I otherwise agree with Johnson. We cannot tell what

was Lucan's intended reaction in his initial audience, or for certain what that reaction actually was. However, some of that audience may well have read or heard at least the earlier parts of the *Satyricon*. What would such an audience's reaction have been to the 'zany gaucheries' and 'fantastic excesses' of Trimalchio and Eumolpus? They might not have admitted to bad taste and frivolous irreverence, but they must surely have been entertained by them.

Johnson (51) speculates on whether Lucan in the Cato episode is indulging himself in 'decadent violence' for its own sake, or whether he created 'those gross absurdities simply for entertainment', when he panders to the debased tastes of his audience. Johnson had doubts about that, as I do; but either way one must ask similar questions about Petronius and the sexual adventures of his heroes, substituting 'sexual behaviour' for 'violence'. Like Lucan, Petronius is, I think, certainly enjoying himself; and, I am sure, intends his audience to do likewise. Johnson (103) also sees Lucan as protesting against 'corrupt and specious grandeur that seeks to hide genuine evil.' Petronius, if he was doing likewise, was certainly concealing it quite well. The few possible hints of protest against the powers that be seem subordinate to the general enjoyment of the plot and its characters.

As noted above, Seneca and Lucan between them provided the violent and the bizarre. While Petronius also

included these, especially the latter, his forte was probably the sexual. So, was there an all absorbing interest in the sexual in Petronius' time as there was in the violent? It is difficult to say. It may be that no era is more interested in sex than any other; just that one hears more about it in some eras, when perhaps people felt more free to discuss and write about such matters openly. Scandals in the imperial court may have stimulated such interest in Rome at that time; and, as I implied above, there is always some latent interest. Such an interest was not so much a reflection of the entertainment in the arena of course, but of that in the theatre of the time. Of course the theatre, like the shows, required an audience; as Petronius did, and it is to that I now turn attention.

b) Petronius and his Audience

Some of the possible purposes of Petronius' work, particularly those regarding protest, have already been discussed. Whatever purpose the work had, however, that purpose would be directed towards having some effect on its readers, or on those to whom it was read aloud. The various theories, noted above, as to the underlying theme or purpose of the *Satyricon* all presuppose that Petronius was intending to have an audience for his work; one that would appreciate its content, style and purpose.

It could be the case that Petronius was writing for purely personal amusement; but that would mean writing possibly one of the longest ever novels for his eyes alone; and surely a work for such a select readership would not have survived, even in its present mutilated form. If then Petronius was writing for an audience, who may that audience have been?

If we possessed the whole of the *Satyricon*, the opening sentences, as often in books, may have been addressed to its readers, or at least have given some clue as to who they may have been. Certainly the sections that we have give no direct information in that respect. The only real place where Petronius might seem to be addressing his audience, through the narrator Encolpius, is in the poem, already mentioned, in 132,15: 'Why do you, Cato's disciples, look at me with wrinkled foreheads and condemn a work of fresh simplicity? A cheerful kindness laughs through my pure speech, and my clear mouth

reports whatever people do. All men born know of mating and the joys of love; all men are free to let their limbs glow in a warm bed. Epicurus himself, the true father of truth, bade wise men be lovers, and said that therein lay the goal of life.' After a probable lacuna comes the assertion in prose: 'Nothing is more insincere than people's silly persuasions, or more silly than their sham morality.'

I have quoted the above in full because of the following points to be made from it. There may well have been Stoics (*Catones*) among Petronius' audience. There was no shortage of them when he was writing. Petronius himself may well have had Epicurean sympathies: in 104 Epicurus is also referred to as *hominem divinum*. Note too Lucretius' references to him as being divine (III,15; V,8). Hence Petronius may have looked askance at Stoics, particularly those who might regard his work with condemnation. That work does indeed include cheerful kindness and respect for people's doings, particularly in the fields of sex and love. The final observation in 132 may be a generalisation, but it could be the kind of thing which Petronius might believe.

Conte (1996,190) wonders whether Petronius could accept the crude definition that would make Epicurus into the eulogiser of the 'joy of sex' as the main purpose of life. 'Such a definition of Epicurean doctrine would only belong to the shallow scholastic culture of Encolpius.' That, I think, may have been Petronius' intention, as is

what is contained in Conte's further comment: 'The vindication of realism in 132,15 echoes the programmatic declarations of the writers of the silver age who stress their decision to deal with every possible aspect of human life;' the prime example of that being of course Juvenal I,85ff.

At the time at which Petronius was writing those were just the kind of beliefs that were ascribed to Epicureans: with their general aim of pleasure, especially of the sexual variety, and their disregard for the gods. However, as H. Jones (1989,51) points out, 'What Epicurean theory calls for is not the random gratification of immediate desires, ... but careful selection of pleasures .... designed to secure the true pleasure which consists of the complete absence of pain.... The road to a truly happy life will lie open only when two particular misconceptions are overcome. One concerns the nature and activities of the gods, the other the meaning of death.' True Epicureans did have respect for the gods, while claiming that they had no influence on human affairs. To them death concerned neither the living nor the dead; 'for the former it does not exist, and the latter are no longer alive' (Diogenes Laertius, X,125).

Jones (84) points out that from Augustus onwards Stoicism began to attract more Romans than Epicureanism did. However, philosophy itself gradually came to occupy a lesser place in Roman life, with strict adherence to one particular sect of less importance than a general

knowledge of the basics of all the philosophical schools. That gave a freedom to adopt whatever ideas suited the mood or the occasion.

By Petronius' time the original tenets of Epicureanism had become rather elastic, as indeed had those of Stoicism. Petronius may be reflecting this wider view, or perhaps the perceived view of Epicureanism among people in general. Also Epicureanism does not seem to have had figures of the stature of the Stoics Thrasea Paetus, Helvidius Priscus or Musonius Rufus to try to keep it on the traditional path.

Rudich, commenting on 132,15 (1997,199), says that Epicurus here is no longer the high-minded sage portrayed in Lucretius' writings. In Petronius' work he is referred to 'in accordance with the popular image of him, as the stock exponent of sexual pleasure.... There is not a trace in the *Satyricon* of the serene life usually associated with the school in the Garden' (252). There is, I agree, a great deal in the work about pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, but little that can be totally connected with the original tenets of Epicurus. N. Slater (1990,85) tends to support that view. He points out that the main supporter of an all-pervading Epicureanism in the *Satyricon*, Raith (1963), admits that 'the work is not a textbook of philosophy' (5), nor was Petronius 'a philosopher in the academic sense' (32).

My own view is that Petronius was probably an Epicurean, and that the work may have reflected the

popular Epicureanism of his day. Walsh (1970,109) also rules out the novel as having a basis in strict Epicureanism, for it would conflict with the 'psychology of the author', and his characterisation of the hero. However he strongly maintains that the work reflects the contemporary form of debased Epicureanism, for Encolpius' progress 'can hardly be adduced to justify any rational philosophy of life.' Panayotakis too (1995,176) maintains that the novel's literary texture does not really argue Epicurean theories being put forward as a design for living. Sullivan (1968 [1],33) claims that the references to Epicureanism by Petronius are not those of a 'fanatic', as he uses philosophy 'humorously and opportunistically'. Perhaps it is only the literary theory of Epicureanism, as handed down by Philodemus, that is to be taken seriously: 'The aim of art is to please, not to instruct.'

I would certainly agree with the last with regard to Petronius, and in general with the opinions of the others on the relationship of Epicureanism to his work. I would also point out that, in attacking the strictures of the *Catones*, Petronius may be doing what Catullus did in his poem 5,2, where he scorns the strictures of *senum severiorum*. I think it is just as possible to equate such *senes* with *Catones* as to equate *Catones* with Stoics. Petronius may be attacking such people in general, not just Stoics. In any case the majority of Stoics would want to be entertained just as much as Epicureans did, for they seem to have gone to the various entertainments along

with everybody else. At worst Petronius was attacking the over zealous among them, a group whom his readers might have appreciated being satirised.

One must also consider whether Encolpius' views here reflect those of Petronius himself. Slater (1990,29) wishes to play down any connection between the two, without wishing to lessen the effect of 132,15 upon the reader. Sullivan (1968 [1],159) claims that Petronius would not wish to be identified with the narrator, particularly in the *Cena*. However, Sullivan was prepared to accept that Petronius was willing 'for his local purposes to allow his judgements on art to emerge from what are at first sight unexpected sources.' That is all very well, but one simply cannot pick and choose those passages which suit what one wants to say, and twist or ignore those which do not. At any particular point one simply cannot be sure that Petronius is speaking through a particular character, or indeed that he is not. Sullivan, however, regards the poem in 132 as being 'a key to the whole work. It pleads for naturalism of attitude, language and subject matter' (1965,17). I feel that that is consistent with what we know of Petronius, and that perhaps his feelings come closest to the surface in 132. So it may to that extent be a key to the work.

Williams (1992,140) points out that Ovid was an innovator with regard to an audience. 'In the *Amores* the poet envisages an audience present in front of him, and he interacts with that audience by means of hints and winks.'

It is possible to see, if one wishes, where Petronius gives 'hints and winks' to his audience, but that presupposes that he is speaking through Encolpius, or indeed others; and also that there are those in the audience ready and able to recognise the hints.

Holzberg (1995,72) makes the point that, while Petronius nowhere indicates that his work is a vehicle for satirical criticism of society or morals, there are still indications that it is 'more than just amusing entertainment for all to see.' Perhaps so, but I think that the audience could still regard it as pure entertainment, if it so wished. Zeitlin too (1971 [2],642) points out that Petronius cannot deny his audience's expectations completely, otherwise his would be 'an entirely private and uncommunicable work.' That may be true, but it is not altogether clear what these expectations were in Petronius' audience, and therefore difficult to say how he fulfilled them. Perhaps they had expectations of entertainment and variety, which Petronius met as the occasion demanded. The work's composition may therefore have been casual, rather than systematically planned from the outset; without perhaps even a fixed finishing point.

At any rate I do think that it is true that the author is trying to convey something to a reader. Basically Petronius is trying to tell a story: the adventures of Encolpius and his friends; an amusing and entertaining tale. It may be possible to discern hidden plots and

meanings at times, as commentators have tried to do, with varying success. However, I would assert that we have too little of the novel to be sure of any continuous plot or hidden meaning in it. What we do have is an entertaining story, backed up and enriched with references to, and echoes of previous and probably contemporary literature. It may well be that many of these references could be understood only by a sophisticated and well read audience; and that possible references to life at Nero's court, or indeed elsewhere, could be understood only by those with some knowledge of the incidents or places concerned.

Bagnani (1954 [1],66), in advocating the *Satyricon* as an indictment of contemporary society's crass materialism, feels that it was too good not to be appreciated, but its readers may have wondered uneasily, 'What was the fellow driving at?' Indeed it may be true that many of Petronius' readers may have wondered just that; and not only sophisticated ones either. One should remember too that satirists such as Persius and Juvenal might seem to be adopting a moral tone, but on closer inspection it is doubtful whether they really are pressing home the moral perspective. Petronius indeed seems to have adopted an even more uncertain moral perspective than theirs.

It appears to me that no one has produced an entirely convincing explanation of what Petronius really was 'driving at'. Perhaps his *dissimulatio* was too subtle for that. At any rate I would again emphasise that, whether or not Petronius' readers did wonder what his aims were,

it was still possible to read and appreciate *Satyricon* without recognising all the references and without reading between the lines. Hubbard (1986,212) claims that it consists of a complex series of motifs and events which require to be read 'backwards, forwards and sideways in both directions, with a keen memory to all resonances and parallels.' One could indeed read the work in that manner if one wished, but, unless one had a capacious memory and an encyclopaedic knowledge of ancient literature, one would have great difficulty in ever finishing the reading of an already long work. It is much better to read and enjoy the story and develop the references if one wishes.

Perhaps then Petronius was aiming at more than one level of audience, just as his protests appear to have had more than one level of expression. Perhaps he felt that he could thus appeal to a wider audience. Did he think, as Laurence Sterne declared in 1760, 'I wrote not to be fed, but to be famous'? Ross (1983,ix) wrote: 'Literary esteem and social notoriety: Sterne knew and valued them both.' One must wonder whether Petronius had the same acquaintance and values, and whether he was aiming at some wider, popular esteem. In that case one might be puzzled by Eumolpus, who is apparently aiming for literary esteem, and quite prepared to accept social notoriety; see 90,1 and 118. Perhaps Petronius is poking fun at those who are overambitious in this respect, given their incompetence.

If Petronius was trying to win the above, he would have to achieve certain things before it could be

attained. He would have to get his work known outside the restricted circle where it may well have been first recited; then he would have to capture and retain that wider audience. It is therefore necessary that consideration be given to the nature and extent of Petronius' possible audience.

c) The Nature of Petronius' Audience

In the extant portion of his work Petronius makes no definite reference to the nature of his audience. What is said in 132,15 is discussed above. However, Petronius' near contemporary, Persius, is more forthcoming. Powell (1992,151), notes that the latter (1,126-136) excludes from his audience 'those with taste for crude, xenophobic jokes, those who enjoy making insulting comments about personal appearance, self-important local dignitaries, those who like to make fun of intellectual pursuits, and like to see philosophers subjected to minor indignities. From this it follows that Persius aims to appeal to a sophisticated reader.' As some of Petronius' characters indulge in some of the above pursuits, and some, particularly Eumolpus, complain about them, it would seem that Petronius is making no real attempt to exclude anyone from his audience. Persius may feel obliged to address the sophisticated reader alone; and in 1.2 he shows unconcern that his audience will be few. However, Petronius may have been trying to interest more than the sophisticated reader, though he would have done that perfectly well, and have been concerned about the extent of his audience,

Powell also notes (204-205) that 'Authors were intensely conscious of their audience.' From time to time they did specify the audience at which they were aiming: e.g. Horace, *Satires*, I.10.74-90; and Persius above. He goes on to caution (209): 'The attempt to gauge the

intentions of the author of a literary work is in principle not very different from our attempts in everyday life to interpret what other people say and do.' For in our interpretation of literary texts we constantly use evidence from outside in order to decide the author's probable intentions; and I would add their possible effect on the contents and style of his work, and possibly our own attitude towards it. A reader can of course choose not to consider the author's intention in his reading, 'but one who does not is not very likely to emerge with a clear understanding of the text.' That may indeed be true of a work of non-fiction where the author is trying to inform or persuade his reader. However, in a work of fiction, does it matter to the ordinary reader what the author's intentions, if any, are, beyond those of entertaining his reader and persuading him to buy his other works? A narrative can stand on its own through content only, without any concern about teaching lessons. It may well contain the author's views on various matters, as he tries to achieve an effect or fulfil an intention; but the reader is free to ignore them at will. Obviously an author who puts forward views that are abhorrent to a large number of potential readers is not going to attract a very wide readership. Some authors may be happy enough about that, but Petronius' embracing of much of what was popular in his time and avoidance of direct attacks on anyone in particular may suggest that he had an eye to his readership.

Walsh (1970,87) would also have us look closely at 9,8, as Ascyltus, in the middle of an argument, addresses Encolpius directly - *non taces....;* and makes some comments about Encolpius' character and habits. It is difficult to see that Petronius is equating himself with anyone here, and so portraying his own character. It is easier simply to regard the remarks as part of the story, consistent with what the characters might say in the course of such an argument.

We are left then with 132.15 as the only place in which Petronius may be regarded as addressing his readers, whoever these might be. There may well have been Stoics in the audience; and Epicureans also, for one can surely assume that at least some of Petronius' friends shared his apparent philosophical views. However to discover the nature and extent of his audience we have to look more widely than at their possible philosophical outlook.

Virtually all the commentators on the *Satyricon* declare without qualification that the work was intended for a closely knit group of Petronius' friends at Nero's court. For instance Rose argues (1971,41): 'It would seem that many features of the *Satyricon* .... can be explained by the demonstration that it was written for the amusement of Nero's court circle. It would explain the size of the original work and why the *Satyricon* was so little known in antiquity; apart from its indecency and great size, very few copies will have been made in Petronius' lifetime.' I simply cannot see what the size

has to do with it. It may have more to do with the fact that the audience kept asking for more. Such a manner of production might indeed partly explain the episodic nature of the plot.

Sullivan (1968,83) also declares that the evidence points to the *Satyricon* being written for recitation at Nero's sophisticated and highly literate court circle. 'Whatever Nero's moral failings, he was an emperor as interested in literature proper since Tiberius..... [89] If the *Satyricon* is a work directed primarily at a coterie, the exigencies of the circle .... might determine to an extent the choice of literary form.' On the other hand it might not. Sullivan stops short of declaring that the *Satyricon* must have been written for such a coterie, but he cannot bring himself to imagine a wider audience for it. Periodic recitation of particular episodes, which Sullivan and others appear to be indicating, could take place before any group, not just one particular type.

Sullivan had not changed his views by 1985 (161): 'The *Satyricon* is a strange work unless it is firmly set in the ambience of Nero's court. The allusions and parodies woven into it make no sense otherwise.' However, many of the alleged allusions and parodies are the subject of debate, and, whether or not they allude to Nero and his court, there need be no difficulty in appreciating or understanding the work. One could say that it is a 'strange work', but that is probably due to factors other than alleged allusions and parodies. One could remove

these, and some would still regard it as a 'strange work'. Only the finding of the rest of the *Satyricon* would place the extant parts in context, and possibly make the work less strange.

Walsh (1970) widens the circle of readers, perhaps unintentionally, when he writes that the *Satyricon* was composed within a convention of comic fiction, whose aim was 'sophisticated entertainment for the literary public' (32). He develops this further by saying that Petronius involved his hero in situations familiar 'to readers of educated taste' (67). One must ask whether this be so. Banquets, picture galleries and sexual adventures may indeed be familiar to educated people; but surely they are not confined to them. Also people with no personal experience of such things may still know something about them. Conversely, many educated people might have wanted to steer clear of a banquet with Trimalchio, or of some of Encolpius' odder sexual adventures.

Then Walsh goes on to narrow down the potential audience (69), by noting that the suggestion has frequently been made that the novel was a court entertainment. 'Just as earlier Seneca's plays, more suitable for recitation than for acting, may have been declaimed to a literary circle centred on the court, so the *Satyricon* may have been designed as a hilarious successor, and read in instalments to audiences of intimates.' He claims that this hypothesis goes far to explain some of the characteristic features of the novel,

whose literary structuring presupposes a highly literate audience. 'The parodies of Seneca and Lucan are addressed to those who have already heard their works declaimed by their authors.... Yet the hypothesis of a court entertainment must be advanced with caution.'

Walsh was wise to use such words as 'hypothesis' and 'caution'. There is only limited evidence of how Seneca's and Lucan's work may have been made public. There are controversies over when, where and why Seneca's tragedies were written. I do not wish to be involved with these, but it begs many questions to postulate that Petronius' audience had heard Seneca recite his tragedies, possibly before some of them were born! Again, if the audience did not catch the alleged references to Seneca and Lucan - no matter; they would still get most of the humour. Moreover, if the works of Seneca and Lucan were read to the same narrow audience as Petronius' is alleged to be, then why did their works too not suffer eclipse for about three centuries as Petronius's did? I suspect the size of the original audience had little to do with whether a work survived. Much of Petronius' humour does indeed have a local reference, but much of it takes place elsewhere, and one surely did not have to be an inhabitant of Rome, Croton, Puteoli or wherever to appreciate it.

Of course it could be the case that the above commentators are correct. I am willing to accept that the *Satyricon* may initially have been read to a select band of Petronius' acquaintances at Nero's court. What I am not

prepared to accept without question is that it stopped there; or indeed was intended to stop there. Presumably that allegedly tight knit group did talk to people outside their own magic circle; so that word of Petronius' doings got out into the wider court and beyond. Surely Petronius did not intend his *magnum opus* to be confined to a few hearers, and to die with them.

As noted above, Walsh seems to have been willing to concede that the work may have been intended for a wider audience: of 'educated' people. Petersmann claims (1999,122): 'Petronius wrote for a highly educated readership, whom he wanted to entertain by demonstrating their follies, shortcomings and hypocrisies.' One must ask whether any readership, educated or otherwise, recognises its own follies and hypocrisies. Such failings are not confined to the educated, of course. People are entertained by others' apparent follies and shortcomings, seldom by their own.

However, Rudich (1997,23) writes that with regards preferences or attitudes Petronius' audience was 'not necessarily homogeneous.' He feels Nero and his courtiers would be amused by the obnoxious freedman Trimalchio's pronouncements 'as if he were another Seneca.' He claims also that there is no evidence that the top members of the Neronian court were noted for their 'social snobbery or harsh treatment of their inferiors.' Certainly, courtiers would be amused at the antics of Trimalchio and the other freedmen; but so would others.

Rudich still persists (241) in assuming that the *Satyricon* was recited during the process of composition, or soon thereafter, by the author 'before Nero's court of libertines for whose entertainment it was apparently produced.' No doubt Nero's court of 'libertines' would be entertained by it, but would they be the only audience?

Rudich goes on to hint at a widening of the circle. Once it had been read to the initial circle, what happened? 'Circulating the written text, however, was an entirely different matter. The published product moves out of authorial control.' For it provides any interested party with the possibility of continuous re-reading with the purpose 'of penetrating new layers of discourse and figuring out innuendoes, real and imagined, that previously went unnoticed.' This, says Rudich, needed an audience with 'a rich and broad repertoire.' Thus, having opened the gate a little, he has closed it again, only to re-open it (250): 'The *Satyricon* could indeed have been read as sheer entertainment by a "politically innocent" reader, intent only to follow the *peripeties* of sexual intrigue, or relish the satire of the vulgar, and reluctant to engage in the quest for any hidden subversion.'

This seems to suggest that the work did somehow get outside the court, and that perhaps Petronius intended it to do so. Rudich suggests that its apparent lack of citation among writers for about 300 years may be due to 'a matter of choice, or owing to the novel's pervasive

obscenity' (307). Yet the latter may have ensured its continual 'underground' existence. Rudich hints at this in saying that its adventurous plot and explicit sexuality could easily have acquired for it considerable popularity among ignorant or even semi-literate consumers; 'not unlike the popularity, say, of Boccaccio's *Decameron* among Soviet highschool students of a bygone day, who treated it as a source of pornography' (249).

I agree that, as with the possibility of seeing political or other innuendoes, or not, if one wished, so it was possible for readers to extract whatever entertainment they wished from the work without having to figure out what absolutely everything meant, or was supposed to mean. Also anyone in an audience can see parts of the story which relate to his or her own personal experience. If an author aims widely enough, he is sure to affect just about everybody at some point. Whether the work reached the hands and ears of the general population is certainly debatable. Yet the only block to general circulation would be the exigencies of ancient book production and circulation.

Reynolds and Wilson (ed.2, 1974,23-24) note that under Augustus the book trade began to flourish and we hear of successful booksellers, and that there was a demand for popular works like Vergil's and Horace's. However, whether this necessarily indicated a large reading audience or a literary population is a question which was addressed at length by Harris (1989). He comes to the

conclusion that 'There was a vast diffusion of reading and writing ability in the Greek and Roman worlds, but there was no mass literacy' (13). [*10]

Harris notes that, while there was no mass production of books, they were frequently copied and distributed to the most distant cities of the Empire (225). Even so, Martial's claim (VI.60.1-2) to world wide fame was probably an exaggeration. The main means of circulation was probably through gifts and loans to friends. It was slow and expensive to get work known by means of *recitatio* and publication, as Tacitus (*Dialogus* 3 and 10.1-2) shows. Pinner (1948,34), Kenyon (1951,80) and Quinn (1982,90-92) also describe similar circumstances for getting a book known. However, I must stress that the means of circulation for Petronius' work were exactly the same as for any other author's, no more, no less; and that other authors did manage to get their work as widely circulated as the circumstances of the time allowed.

However, more than that was involved in the transmission of works. Harris (1989,226) points to Strabo (I.19-20): 'City people are affected by myths when they *hear* the poets telling of deeds of heroism; philosophy is for the few, poetry.... is able to fill theatres.' Dio Chrysostom (XX.10) tells how he met people in the hippodrome dancing 'reading out a poem, singing and recounting a history or tale.' While I think it would be wise not to read too much into these, it would seem that ordinary people had at least a little familiarity with

literature, and were able to pass bits of it on orally. I agree with Harris when he says (227): 'There was no such thing as popular literature in the Roman Empire, if that means literature which became known to tens or hundreds of thousands by means of personal reading.... As for works expressly written for the masses there were none.' Pliny the Elder (*Praef.* 6) mentions writing for the *humile vulgus*, but he is addressing Vespasian in a rhetorical manner.

What one can say then is that there were means of getting one's work published abroad in Rome, and that the means of doing so seemed to be improving in Petronius' time. Starr (1987,213-223) suggests that ancient authors may have wanted 'to reach beyond their own friends and their friends.' Quinn (1982,152) supports that view. While again it would be unwise to make too much of that, it again must be stressed that Petronius had all the contemporary means of written circularisation at his disposal. He may have meant his work for his friends and their friends; but beyond them could have been an uncertain and almost untraceable means of oral circularisation among the less privileged and literate.

The question of whether a wider audience would wish or even be able to appreciate Petronius' work is one that must now be addressed. The commentators seem all but unanimous that only a highly educated, well read audience could possibly appreciate the *Satyricon*, and their unquestioning assertion of this has bedevilled any

consideration of Petronius' potential or intended audience.

For instance I have already noted Petersmann's assertion (1999,122) that 'Petronius wrote for a highly educated readership.' In the same vein Sullivan (1968 [1],83) declares that 'We may say that the *Satyricon* was written for recitation to Nero's sophisticated and highly literate court circle.' Walsh (1970,32) states that the aim of the *Satyricon* was 'sophisticated entertainment for the literary public,' as its structure presupposes a highly literate audience (69).

Of course there are many allusions and echoes in the work which could only be understood by a highly educated and widely read audience. It is easy enough to go through the work and pick out references to authors, major and minor, from Homer onwards. However, one must ask whether an understanding of each and every reference was essential to the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the work. It is also worth pointing out that the works of Vergil, and others, contain many references, allusions etc. to Homer and his successors. Yet such restrictions as those noted above were not placed on their audiences. Surely Petronius is no different from them with regard to his audience's understanding.

Conte (1986,56) makes the very valid point that the 'complicity' between the poet and the reader in allusion complicates their relationship. Allusion in its most 'demanding' form (57), requires the direct involvement of

the reader and his culture. 'That culture, and the historical values imbedded in it, are in fact "interrogated" by allusion, which forces on its interpreters a consciousness of their immersion in history.' I accept that fully, but must point out that further complications arise when the readers are from a very different 'culture' from the author. This may involve differences in class, intellect, attitude, race, and so on. Readers may well interpret the author in the light of their own culture, and indeed of his, if they are aware of it; but they need not do so, merely concentrating on the story, or whatever, that is before them. In this respect Conte's remarks on allusion on page 27 of his work should again be borne in mind.

N. Slater poses an important question (1990,17): 'What did the original audience need to know in order to read the *Satyricon*?' This question has led to what, in my opinion, are the totally unjustifiable assumptions by the commentators noted above, and by others. Slater (20) wonders whether readers would know, or need to know, all the references in the work; and it is that question with which we should really be concerned. Slater also poses other interesting questions (235): 'Can an author or text intend a meaning and succeed in conveying that meaning to a reader? .... [236] When faced with a text as wonderfully comic and subversive as the *Satyricon*, the usual question "Can this author or text intend to mean something?" may be the wrong one to ask.' He finds the

work resists any attempt to discern a parodied text or a 'deep hidden meaning' beneath or distinct from the surface text (249); and that the meaning of the *Satyricon* is not a 'what' but a 'when', displayed in its power to generate laughter (250).

Stephens makes an interesting point with regard to the ancient novel (1994,405): 'A prerequisite for .... the flourishing of this genre was an increased level of literacy in the population.' That of course may be true. The more people who can read in general, the more who can read a particular work. It does miss one point, however. It assumes that you have to be able to read in order to be acquainted with a particular work. However, it is perfectly possible to have it read to you, and to be able to retain at least the main plot in your memory. Indeed many blind people who proceed in this manner are capable of much more than that. Moreover there is much evidence that reading aloud to an audience was how ancient authors got their work known in the first place. Copies might be made or obtained of an attractive work and read to others, and so on. This significant factor in getting a book known was not necessarily tied to the extent to which the population in general could read, though the spread of literacy might help to get more understanding for the work.

Quinn asks (1982,93): 'What did Vergil's original audience do?' He then wonders how many people in the generation after Vergil ever attained what could be called

a working knowledge of the *Aeneid*, given that few would have been capable of reading the text in three days, let alone make sense of it. Yet it would seem that Vergil was 'popular' with a certain section of the population; how large is unknown. Quinn tellingly remarks: 'Such questions challenge common assumptions about the relationship of a Roman writer to his contemporary audience and point to the terrifying extent of our ignorance.' Such a caveat must colour all considerations of the matter! To that is allied Quinn's further comment that the problem that dogged Roman literature throughout its history was the lack of an audience 'large and representative enough to make the writer feel that he is fulfilling a social function.' That may well be true; as true of Petronius as of any other authors. Yet many of them, some indeed of inferior ability, managed to get their works tolerably well known. So why not Petronius?

Stephens (406) wonders to what extent our notion of the 'popular' audience is dependent upon 'an assessment of the books themselves.' It is true that some, by analysis of the style or content of a work, may make assumptions therefrom as to the readership to which it was directed, and indeed to the readership who actually read it. Certainly a highly specialised or technical work is obviously directed towards a particular type of reader; and no one else would want, or be able to read it with any appreciation of the content. However, it is much more difficult to define the readership of a more general work,

particularly one of fiction. One might say that such and such a group might find more of interest or enjoyment in a particular novel, but not that any other group would totally ignore it, providing of course that it was generally available. [*11]

Certainly the *Satyricon* seems to have been a very long work; but so was Livy's *History*, and it appears to have been popular enough for its time; though considerable portions of it too have been lost. It would of course have been possible to cut the *Satyricon* into smaller sections suitable for recitation. Some episodes could be covered in one session, others would take more; but, in the manner of early 'cliffhanger' films, the break on each occasion could have been made at a critical point, leaving the audience eager to know the outcome at the next session. This could even popularise a novel rather than militate against it. Moreover, in the *Satyricon* even the main episodes themselves have episodes within them; witness the *Cena*.

Schmeling (1999,33) makes the point that even in its fragmentary state the *Satyricon* can be seen as episodic. He emphasises, however, that the *Satyricon* is not merely a collection of episodes and tales, strung together 'without any motivation, cause/effect, or unifying characters.' I would agree with that, and thus liken it to serialisation of works in the media. For many more recent novels, Dickens's for instance, were originally published in serial form, with the readers waiting expectantly from one

week or month to the next for the new episode. It may also be the case that ancient audiences were prepared to sit for longer periods than we are - provided that they had the time - and that they had a longer attention span. At any rate there seems to be no reason why a novel cannot have been recited and popularised in the same way as any other ancient written work.

In addition, Stephens (415) makes a very valid point: 'The need to create a different audience for stories we perceive as Romantic or fanciful may simply reflect our own cultural prejudices.' It may well be true that modern commentators considering Petronius' potential audience are influenced by modern ideas as to what sort of people would enjoy a work like the *Satyricon;* and by their own knowledge and intelligence in being able to spot and understand the majority of the references and allusions. Yet again, the lack of ability to understand all the references need not detract too much from one's enjoyment of the work. After all, many millions of people have read Shakespeare's plays or watched them performed. How many of those people, both in his day and since, have understood all the allusions in his works to earlier or contemporary literature, persons and events? Not all of them are clear, not all understood even by Shakespearian scholars. Yet that has not detracted from the enjoyment or appreciation of millions.

How many readers of the Bible understand all the the references or questions raised without going to the effort

of looking them up in some work of reference? Yet this had not prevented a general appreciation of the content or argument of the Bible, or a spread of the doctrines contained in it.

A similar situation seems to have been recognised by Joyce in writing *Ulysses*. J. Johnson writes (1993,xiii): 'From the outset, Joyce recognized that his audience, whether popular or literary, were going to be nonplussed.' It is here recognised that Joyce's audience was not homogeneous; that its various components would each have its own problems with the work. Johnson adds: '*Ulysses* looked like a novel, but it also looked like a drama, a catechism, or poetry or music depending on what page one happened to open.' Virtually all of that could be applied to the *Satyricon*. Also how many readers of *Ulysses* recognised its relationship with the *Odyssey*, or even who Ulysses/Odysseus was? Yet that would not have affected their appreciation of the work to any significant extent.

Probably all of the *Satyricon's* original readers knew of Odysseus and would appreciate the various allusions to the *Odyssey*. However, even if they did not, and I suspect at least some modern readers do not, that does not mean that the thread of the story would be lost. People in such situations can simply ignore the passage or improvise a meaning to suit the context. A reader can be nonplussed without being put off.

Therefore one simply cannot make assumptions from a work of general fiction as to who its audience was

intended to be - though guesses can be made in some cases - or who its audience in fact was. They need not be able to understand all the allusions to appreciate it, nor indeed be able to read. The Roman educational system mocked by Petronius did at least produce some who could read; but that education was confined to those who could pay for it. It was probably beyond the means or need or inclination of those whose main interests were *panem et circenses*. Even so, there may well have been those in that class to whom Petronius' work might have appealed, if only for some of its content; like the *Decameron* appealed to the Russian high school pupils of Rudich's youth.

It also seems possible that Petronius' work may have achieved a wider audience or readership despite the restrictions of the book trade. However, if a work did not achieve a wide audience, it may have been as much a fault of the work as of the system. That brings me to a puzzling point: the apparent disappearance of the *Satyricon* from the shelves of commentators for some 300 years. Even when later commentators did begin to quote from it, they did so in order to point out the use of unusual words, grammatical points, etc. They did not have much to say about its content or tone.

I do not support Rose's claim (1971,41) that only one or two copies of the work was made during Petronius' lifetime, due to its size - after all copies were made of Livy's work; but there may be something to be said for his claim about the indecency factor. Rudich (1997,307)

also mentions 'pervasive obscenity' as a possible factor, though he concedes that it may simply have been choice on the part of commentators to ignore the work. If Tacitus was aware of Petronius' work, he did not mention it; though, as noted above, that may not be too significant. However, had the work caused open offence and possible protest, one might have expected even Tacitus to mention it. Conversely, it should not be assumed that, simply because none of the commentators mention it, the work was not being read, or was outside the ken of virtually everyone in the population. It is somewhat unlikely that a manuscript turned up out of the blue 300 years later, to be picked over by the grammarians. So what did antiquity feel about the *Satyricon*?

Sullivan (1968,112) notes a passage in Macrobius (*Comm. in Somnium Scipionis*, I,2,8): 'The hearer is merely pleased by such examples as the comedies which Menander put on stage, and the plots packed with people in love, a genre to which the Arbiter applied himself a great deal and with which to our surprise Apuleius sometimes trifled.' One has to assume that Macrobius, writing c.400, was referring to the *Satyricon*. It was not a comic drama, but the extant portion does certainly contain the elements that Macrobius mentions. I think Sullivan is right when he says that from this we can infer that the *Satyricon* impressed the ancients 'as a tale of predominantly sexual adventure;' and that it was more noteworthy in that respect than Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

A little after Macrobius, Marius Mercator says of Julian's language (*in verba Iuliani*, VI,1): 'You deserve to get the acclamation of the groundlings .... for you have surpassed the talents of Martial and Petronius.... You clown after the fashion, the fashion in which you have run the performances [*theatrum*] of the Arbiter and Martial into the ground. It is a shared assumption of those human writers that lust was implanted in human nature.' Sullivan is probably correct in saying that *theatrum* is here being used metaphorically by Marius, intending to connect Julian with the mime and its obscenities; 'Obviously this is the worst obscenity Marius can think of.' References to the mime's obscenity can be found in Martial, VIII, *Epistola ad lectorem*; Valerius Maximus, II,102; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 37,12.

It would seem from the above writers that Petronius was not a largely unknown author; he could be mentioned in the same breath as Martial and Apuleius. While Petronius' style, like Julian's, may have been seen as elegant, it is his emphasis on lust that has caught the eye. Marius mentions that Julian played to the groundlings, and perhaps it can be inferred that Petronius is considered to have done likewise. Shakespeare was also accused of that at times. Did all these authors feel that there was a part of their audience to which they had to pander? - a part different from the sophisticated, intellectual and widely read one which some suppose to have been Petronius' sole readership. It may be that in

the 300 years after Petronius' death authors and commentators, who came largely, if not wholly, from the sophisticated, intellectual bracket, saw Petronius' clowning and lust as purely the interest of the lower, uneducated classes, and therefore not worth their own interest. Moreover, as Kragelund remarks (1989,147), 'Transmission was never favourable to heterodoxy.' It may also be that it was only when the commentators and grammarians of the fourth century were looking for quarries of obscure words and grammatical usages that Petronius came into play. Perhaps his work's apparent obscenity had simply blocked people's view of it as a whole. Certainly Sterne with *Tristram Shandy* and Joyce with *Ulysses* ran into the same problem. In each case the initial furore was about the obscenity, and it was only gradually that the other aspects of the work came to be appreciated; see Ross (1983,ix). Moreover, if Petronius was seen as aiming at the lower, uneducated orders, one cannot know if he was successful in this. Perhaps he was the kind of author that everyone reads, but no one admits to reading. For all of the above, the 'disappearance' of the *Satyricon* for 300 years remains a mysterious one.

Sage (1990,913) makes the point that in Tacitus, and indeed in other authors, 'The Roman populace is portrayed as an undifferentiated group which is always animated by factors governed by its perception of its own interests, rather than by any concern for the welfare of the state.' Thus Tacitus at least partly regarded the populace simply

as one *panem et circenses* group, just as Juvenal did (10.78). Fronto, writing 100 years after Petronius, remarks (*Preamble to History*, 17): 'The Emperor [Trajan] did not neglect even actors and the other performers of the stage, or the circus, or the amphitheatre, knowing as he did that the Roman people are held fast by two things above all; the corn dole and the shows; that .... by largesses of food only the proletariat on the corn register are conciliated singly and individually, whereas by the shows the whole populace is kept in good humour.' This indicates that shows of all kinds were popular, and with the population as a whole. Thus, while Petronius might not be able to do much about feeding the population, he had plenty of scope to play to its enthusiasm for entertainment; and it is to that I now turn my attention.

7. 'THE PLAY'S THE THING'

I have already mentioned the general interest in the circus and arena and Petronius' response to that. However, if there is one matter on which all modern commentators on Petronius seem to agree, it is that the work is very theatrical in character. Indeed there are some direct references to the theatre in the *Satyricon*. For instance, in 3 there is a reference to *ficti adulatores cum cenas divitum captant* - the parasites referred to so often in the *fabulae palliatae*. In 5 there is mention of those who 'sit before the stage applauding an actor's grimaces for a price;' arguably also a reference to Nero's use of claques for his stage performances. In 52 Trimalchio imitates the actor Syrus, while slaves sing in chorus in the manner of a pantomime performance. Trimalchio's love of entertainment extends beyond the theatre, however, for in 53 he mentions his love of horn players and acrobats, which at times had competed with the theatre for people's attention. However, in 59 a troupe of actors comes in - *Homeristae* - who perform a scene in Greek, while Trimalchio reads the plot aloud from a Latin text; almost in the manner of modern subtitles. His delineation of the plot distorts all known mythology, but Petronius has his fun at Trimalchio's expense, while bringing in yet another theatrical reference. In 68 Habinnas' slave gives a recitation from Vergil, into which he mixes *Atellanicos versus;* and Habinnas says of him that he has no equal

'when he wants to imitate mule-drivers or hawkers.' These were also stock characters in Atellan farce. 'He is a cobbler too, a cook or confectioner.' Slaves with talent in the kitchen also appear in *fabulae palliatae,* so that the slave is connected by Petronius with more than one form of theatrical entertainment.

In 80, there is a reference to the Theban brothers' quarrel, which played a part in various Greek, and later tragedies. Brothers' quarrels also play a part in some *fabulae palliatae.* That the theatre was used for performances other than drama is apparent in 90, when Eumolpus mentions the usual reception he gets when he recites poetry there. In 126 Eumolpus remarks that some women 'burn for a gladiator, a muleteer smothered in dirt, or an actor disgraced by exhibiting himself on the stage.' Whatever Eumolpus may say, successful gladiators and actors were popular in some quarters: but 'muleteers' - did he mean actual muleteers, or those appearing as stock characters in Atellan farce? At any rate the reference to the theatre is plain enough. There are other, perhaps less obvious references to the *palliatae* and *Atellanae.* The freedmen in the *Cena* seem to be a mixture of bores, buffoons, boors, petty complainers and small tradesmen, of the kind that form the stock of those forms of entertainment. So there are strong references to various forms of theatrical entertainment in the work; but it is to the mime that most commentators direct attention.

The mime too is mentioned directly in the *Satyricon.*

In 35 'Trimalchio himself ground out a tune from the musical comedy "Assafoetida" in a most hideous voice;' and in 55 he asks, 'How would you compare Cicero and Publilius?' Publilius was a writer of literary mimes in the late first century BC. Trimalchio goes on to quote sixteen lines alleged to be his, on luxury and greed at Rome; however, they may be some sort of pastiche by Petronius in an another attack on the rhetoric bound literature of his day. At any rate Publilius would seem to have been well enough known fifty years or more after his prime.

In 78 Trimalchio's trumpet players cause such a disturbance that the heroes manage to slip out in the confusion. Such an abrupt ending to an episode was characteristic of the mime. There is mention of the mime at the end of 80, in four lines of verse which are apparently misplaced there: 'A company acts a farce [*mimum*] on a stage: one is called the father, one the son, and one is labelled the Rich Man. Soon the comic parts are shut in a book [doubtful reading], the real men's faces come back, and the made-up disapppear.' The above characters could also be found in other types of entertainment, but the use of *mimum* and the reference to the three character set-up common in mime probably mean that it is indicated. What precisely Petronius is getting at here is unclear due to the mispositioning, but to me he would seem to be comparing man's life to the temporary nature of the performance of a mime on the stage. If so,

it would be a useful and apposite comparison to make.

Eumolpus asks his companions (117): 'Well then, ... why shouldn't we make up a farce?' (*mimum*). This was to try to get them all involved in the legacy hunting business at Croton. Such a quirky idea would perhaps be normal for a mime. They agree to make Eumolpus their manager, and there follows a farcical and indecent performance, such as characterised the mime. Already in 101-110 there has been much role play and farce in the heroes' odd adventures on the ship, as Eumolpus gets Encolpius and Giton to have their heads shaved and be made up to escape pursuit and punishment; and as they encounter Tryphaena, Chrysis and Circe in turn in farcical and indecent scenes. The fragments in 140-141, with the sexual incidents with Corax and Eumolpus' will, also seem connected with the farcical plots of some mimes. Quite apart from the explicit mention of the mime noted above, it is this farcical and indecent milieu and general sense of play acting which have led commentators to compare the *Satyricon* to a theatrical performance, and that of a mime in particular. [*12]

Sullivan (1968 [1],223-224) gives a good basic analysis of the situation: 'In sum it may be said that the mime subjects and situations provide part of the grist for Petronius' sophisticated and literary mill.' They provide much of the melodrama, movement and incident for the plot and some of its farcical humour. 'There are swift disappearances, violence, quarrels, concealments,

enforced baths, impostures and dramatic bouleversements.' However, I think one should beware of attributing all of these to the direct influence of the mime. Some features of the plot could simply have been taken from the oddities of everyday life rather than from the theatre. That seems especially so of the *Cena*, which appears less dependent on the mime in any case.

However, the various incidents and situations of the mime are well represented in the *Satyricon* as a whole, where again the coarseness of the mime is also very significant. The *Satyricon* is often referred to as a picaresque novel, in line with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; 'picaresque' being defined as fiction dealing with the adventures of rogues, sometimes upper class or well born, but fallen from grace. While Encolpius and his fellows are not out and out criminals, though some of their actions border on the unlawful - as in the market scene (12-14); legacy hunting (116ff.) - they are hardly respectable citizens either. They seem able to get around, living on their wits, so they cannot be entirely plebeian. Yet in their current situation they would hardly fall in line with the notion of patrician *gravitas*.

In addition they are often the unsuspecting butts of farcical humour and incidents. They are indeed the sort of people who would appear in a mime: the three actors who get in a scrape, often in disreputable or obscene circumstances, and get out of it by some contrivance or other, going on to fight another day. Sullivan is right

to point out that some of the situations are also common to traditional comedy and to satire, as I have noted above; but it is fair to say that the mime is a dominant force in the plot. Sullivan (230) notes that Petronius is also particularly fond of the humour of 'contrast and incongruity', and that the tone of lofty disdain for the lower pleasures in 84 is deflated by the story of Eumolpus' adventures in Pergamum in the next section. That too could have been a feature of mime. Perhaps also this general lack of *gravitas* may be an indication that Petronius is aiming at a wider audience than an upper class one; and the mime appears to have been entertainment for all.

Walsh (1970,106) sees the Circe incident as both the most scabrous and most literary incident of the work. He notes that the theme of a high born lady seeking sexual satisfaction from a servant was found in the mime; 'Petronius' narrative is permeated with a mimic unreality.' That, I think, needs amplification. Each of the adventures of Encolpius is just about credible in itself, for instance the voyage in 99-116, if somewhat unlikely on some occasions; but overall the series is barely credible for a human being, and it is probably not meant to be. Certainly that impression would be heightened if Encolpius' adventures in the lost part of the work were in the same vein. Moreover, Priapus features in the extant part; and he was a character prominent on the mimic stage. Walsh also notes that

several literary mimes were named after signs of the Zodiac, which may be reflected in Trimalchio being characterised as an astrologer.

Walsh also makes reference to the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 3010 as containing a parallel to the Circe incident. This fragmentary papyrus, in Greek, of possibly the second century AD, does indeed have some parallels with Petronius, but also some differences; as pointed out by Parsons in his analysis of it (1971,53-68). Was it an imitation of Petronius even, and thus an indication that his work was known at that time? Parsons is right, I think, to say that that 'falls infinitely short of proof.' Yet even if it is not based on Petronius, it does show that the Circe type story was not confined to him. Indeed McKeown (1979,79) makes the point that Encolpius' impotence seems to be a reflection of Ovid, *Amores*, III,7, where the latter laments his own. Martial, XII,83 hints that impotence may have been the subject of mime. At any rate the Circe incident is presented in a dramatic form 'reminiscent of mime'.

N. Slater (1990,101-105) makes much of the incident of Encolpius' reconciliation with Ascyltus and Giton in 91-98 as a 'Mime Interlude'. In the incident (94,15-95,1) where Giton and then Encolpius apparently attempt suicide, 'Neither is hurt, and the whole scene is revealed as a staged farce: .... "Nor did Eumolpus interrupt this farcical death. While this scene was being played among the lovers....".' Episodes of faked death were common in

Greek romances, and may well have had an influence in this scene. 'It is worthwhile, however, to ask who is in control of the mime frame at this point.' Slater comes to the conclusion that it is Eumolpus, an 'improvisational rival' for Encolpius. I am inclined to think that Slater goes too far in trying to fit events in detail into a mime frame. If Petronius had done that, it would have made for a contrived work, and one that it would be difficult to sustain over sixteen books or more.

However, Slater points out the improvisational factor here. Indeed improvisation would seem to have been a feature of at least the non literary mime, and would account for the mime's often sudden ending, when the characters had got themselves into a situation where an abrupt, unexpected or unexplained ending was the only way out; as in the heroes' escape from their problems at Trimalchio's (78). Cicero (*pro Caelio*, 65) refers to the conclusion of a mime in which, when no end could be found, 'The clappers give the signal, and the curtain rises;' thus possibly giving an abrupt or illogical ending.

Schmeling (1991,363) points out that the stories of the Widow of Ephesus (111-112) and the Pergamene *ephebus* (85-87) end 'with lightning quickness and not in the places where the reader had expected.' I think that the *Cena* episode too ended abruptly, though Schmeling (365) notes that it concluded with 'a scene of graphic description and excitement;' while the other two incidents had 'verbally witty' conclusions. He concludes

that the various types of endings 'which could convey a purpose, a moral or a cohesive element' are used instead to cap off an episode with a pun or other witticism. (371). Some mimes may well have come to a 'natural' conclusion, but many seem to have ended in expediency as the plot began to break down. While I feel that it would be difficult to assert that Petronius' plots for the various episodes were in imminent danger of breaking down, the abrupt endings of some suggest that he wanted at least to move on. Moreover, the situation is complicated by possible lacunae at the ends of incidents; for instance in 19, 26, 78, 80, 82, 125.

Slater also notes the reflection of mime in 117, where Eumolpus proposes *mimum componere*, to take advantage of the legacy hunting situation in Croton. 'The parts are essentially typecast,' for Eumolpus is an old man, ready for the legacy hunters, while Encolpius and Giton, with their shaved heads look the part of slaves (91, 116). Such characters of course could be found in other types of drama, but again it is the improvisation that characterises the mime. 'The improvisational scenario complete, they set out with Eumolpus' servant Corax providing the low comedy along the way.' This last bolsters the reflection of the mime in the scene. [*13]

Panayotakis (1995,xvii) develops the argument on the spontaneity of some mime: 'Another important feature of the mimic performance was their very heterogeneity.' This great variety of performances that were called mime may be

why the ancients and others found it difficult to define it. Certainly the *Satyricon* was not above ridiculing anybody and anything; and one can only speculate on some of the targets in the lost portion. Moreover, it often connects itself with the interests of the masses; which, as Panayotakis rightly points out, were not outside the interests of at least some of the upper classes either. However, this incorporation of the mime into much of the *Satyricon* may indeed show that Petronius had an eye on the 'mass market'.

De Saint-Denis (1965,255) poses the interesting questions: 'Is Petronius amusing himself by parodying the style of the Latin mimograph? At the same time is he making fun of the commonplaces which the rhetoricians, the moralists and the poets have poured out about moral decadence?' The answers are probably *yes*, but it is surely true that Petronius used the mime as a basis for so much of his humour that he cannot have had an absolute contempt for it. Also he is just as likely to be mocking those who harped on about moral decadence as he was to be attacking moral decadence itself.

Quite apart from the fantastic or fanciful, the mime also contained realistic situations from everyday life; and Panayotakis (xviii) mentions such as adultery, mock marriages, staged shipwrecks, false deaths and cunning schemes presented in a grotesque fashion. Also, 'Political satire and literary parody, philosophical burlesque and mythological travesties were not alien to

the genre,' While I would dispute that some of the above were exactly part of everyday life for most people, then or now, the majority would, however, have recognised the situations; and of course it is true to say that such situations are 'not alien' to the *Satyricon*. Yet again I must point out that Petronius may have taken some such situations straight from real life, rather than indirectly from the medium of some mime. One can never be sure about this. [*14]

Choricus, a sixth century commentator (*Apol.Mim.*, 110), lists various 'everyday' characters in mime like the master and his slaves, innkeepers, sausage sellers, cooks, the host and his guests, the lawyers, the young lover and his rival, and so on. Many of these occur also in other types of comic drama, from Aristophanes onwards, but most occur too in the *Satyricon*, and in the *Cena* episode in particular; which, I repeat, seems to take many of its characters from life in general.

Most of Panayotakis' work is involved with an analysis of the *Satyricon*, highlighting instances where the plot and characters have been influenced by the mime in particular. It would be difficult to quarrel with his general approach regarding the mime in the *Satyricon*, but I think that it would be wise not to push it too far. Again it must be stressed that we have only a fraction of the work, and I feel that, if the whole work had continuously been using situations and characters adopted or adapted from the mime and indeed other popular drama,

then the author would have been hard put to sustain it; and indeed hard put to sustain his own interest, let alone that of his audience.

Panayotakis himself makes this clear (1995,191): 'Petronius does not confine himself to a circumstantial borrowing of types and elements of plot from the Roman farcical stage.... He also expanded the idea of theatricality in his novel to the appropriate exploitation of the actual structure of staged plays.' He also makes the valid point that it is unlikely that the *Satyricon* could be reduced to the reworking of mimes that Petronius had seen or heard. It is also necessary to take note of the abovementioned reflections of *Atellanae* and *palliatae*, even though the latter were then probably seldom performed on stage; and that the work is 'not a disorderly gathering of different literary genres' (192). However, one must give thought to the fact the field of mime was a very wide one, and that Petronius may have strayed on to it at times with his wide ranging incidents, without necessarily seeking to frame the whole work in this way.

In similar vein Conte writes tellingly (1996,161): 'We cannot turn the *Satyricon* into a collection of satires, a collage of individual satiric pieces, that would treat the most disparate arguments enclosed in a narrative framework.' He wants the structural constant in the work to be 'a continuous action constructed of narrative elements from the novel.' Again I think that, while it is possible to see elements of the Greek novel in

the *Satyricon*, it is not really feasible to force the work into that genre; though again certainty is impossible without the whole work. In general terms, I think it may be possible to say with Panayotakis that the various episodes have become 'elements in a sexual farce', but with the guiding influence being role play and pretence: perhaps again some of the *dissimulatio* of which Rudich makes so much.

So, what of the mime which played such a part in the *Satyricon*? Beacham describes it (1991,130): 'The mime itself was short, largely improvised, and often delivered in unliterary language (including much slang) which the performer was quick to adapt to the mood and response of the audience. Although undoubtedly low-brow jokes, banter and ribaldry were their stock in trade, the mimes directed their comments not only at the *vulgus*, ... but at the better educated and more sophisticated spectators as well.' Cicero (*pro Gallo*, frag.2) sneered at the audience applauding in ignorance, but also noted that they could recognise the frequent topical and satirical allusions (*ad Att.*, XIV,3,3; *ad Fam.*, VII,11,2); while Seneca the Younger admitted that an audience would acclaim some particularly penetrating words of insight or wisdom (*Dial.*, IX,11,8; *Epistles*, VIII,108). This indeed shows that the mime could be appreciated by a wide audience, and perhaps suggests why Petronius made much use of its various attributes listed above.

McKeown (1979,71-85) also makes it clear that the mime

should not be regarded as 'an unsophisticated form of entertainment, which would appeal to unsophisticated minds' (71). Writers of mime could be of high birth or social standing: Laberius was a knight, Matius a friend of Cicero and Julius Caesar. 'Interest among Rome's intellectual elite did not arise simply from *nostalgie de la boue*. Mimes could be highly sophisticated and remarkable for their *doctrina*.' Gellius speaks highly of Matius and his work (X,24,10; XV,25,1-2; XVI,7,1; XX,9,1-3). Thus it seems clear that those of status and intelligence could patronise the mime, even though it was sometimes accused of being aimed at their social inferiors. Beacham (1991,136) suggests, however, that the standard of the mime may have declined during the course of the first century AD, along with possibly the audience's state; the mime's popularity may have induced presenters to take liberties. I suspect that, like Seneca on the gladiator fights, critics may have attacked the mime for one reason or another, but that did not make them absent themselves from it altogether.

Fantham (1988,154) feels that the mime is best defined negatively: 'Whatever did not fit the generic categories of tragedy or comedy, Atellane or the Italian togate comedy, was mime: a narrative entertainment in the media of speech, song and dance.' The *Satyricon* itself would at least partly fill that definition. Fantham cautions, however (155): 'Literary mime was only the tip of the iceberg, and an unofficial genre like this demonstrates

the inadequacy of our knowledge of Roman life, based as it is almost entirely on formal texts.' I too must caution that knowledge is uncertain about many of the informal or oral sources on which Petronius may have drawn. The original audience may have recognised them, but we cannot; though it is still possible to appreciate the work, despite this loss.

Beacham (1991,136-137) too lists the various characteristics of mime plots and characters as undertaking 'to portray the rich variety and quirkiness of everyday life and manners.' Walsh (1970,26-27) provides a similar list, with examples from the *Satyricon* and comments from other ancient authors. Had Petronius then caught and used the tide of the mime at its full, when it appealed to the widest spectrum of spectators? From the *Satyricon* it appears that he may have done so.

I have noted that the *Cena* seems to contain less from the mime. However, Beacham (1999,198-199) points out that the whole of the *Cena* 'is staged as a variety show, with one sensational event following another.' Hubbard says of it (1986,194): 'The *Cena* occupies a very [sic] unique position among the extant portions of the novel.... In many ways it represents an extended pause .... in the dramatic action, but in another respect the *Cena* provides a microscopic recapitulation of the novel as a whole.' Listing all the resentment, deceit etc, he then describes the *Cena* as a series of 'frames'. In other words (N. Slater's, 1990,55), 'Trimalchio is a *spectaculum*, a

performance to be watched.' Thus it deserves close study.

Bartsch (1994, 197) remarks that the *Cena* section 'exhibits a curiously theatrical quality.' Mentioning the various types of entertainment evidenced in it she adds, 'Even the food is dressed up to resemble what it is not.' That may be yet another kind of *dissimulatio* - there is plenty of that in the *Cena;* and possibly a *titillatio* to sustain the audience's interest: for instance the pig and 'Carver' in 36. That incident also makes use of puns and the like - another kind of *dissimulatio;* Sullivan lists about ten instances of these in the work (1968,225).

The *Cena* certainly lends itself to being regarded as a kind of theatrical performance. The reader can easily envisage Trimalchio's dining room as a stage, with its entrances where characters come and go, and where others have their turn to perform their piece - almost in a subversion of Plato's *Symposium*: the servants who present and carve the food (36, 40, 41, 47, 49, 52, 53); the freedmen who give a varied performance of their stories and complaints (41-46, 61-62); the noisy arrival of Habinnas and Scintilla (65-66). It would not be too difficult to turn the *Cena* into a play or film, as indeed has been done; see Sullivan (1991). The mime is found in the *Cena* episode, but the ambience is that of the theatre in general. Perhaps Petronius was trying to show his skill in performative literature, just as he may have been doing in narrative literature in the Eumolpus episode.

Rosati (1983,214) emphasises the entertainment value

of the *spectaculum* that is the *Cena*. 'Every episode .... is endowed with its own potential for spectacle, as the figure of Trimalchio himself already is:' *nec tam pueri nos .... ad spectaculum duxerant quam ipse pater familiae* (27,2). Rosati (215-217) particularly notices the part of the *scissor* (35,3-8; 36,6-8; 59,7); musical accompaniment (28,5; 31,7; 32,1); applause (40,1; 50,1) and amazement (28,6; 29,1; 30,1; 30,5; 34,8); much of which would be features of the various types of contemporary entertainment. 'Many different indications, then, confirm the centrality in the course of the *Cena* of the "spectacle" reference,' notes Rosati (218); and he mentions the *ludi circenses* and the *munera gladiatoria*, as well as the theatre, which also feature in the *Cena*. It is not only Trimalchio who is interested in these, but also his slaves and guests, including Encolpius. Rosati is certainly right to emphasise this all pervading role of spectacle and entertainment in the *Cena*, which he views as a series of performances.

He also points to Cicero's note (*ad Fam.* VII,26,2) that it was one of the attributes of Roman gastronomy that dishes were presented in such a way that their main ingredients were not recognised (220). That too fits in with the *dissimulatio* pervasive in the *Cena*, and indeed throughout the work: even in the fragmentary 141: 'Just shut your eyes and dream you are eating up a solid million instead of human flesh. Besides we shall find some sauce which will change the taste.' Thus Eumolpus' *cena* -

assuming it is he who is speaking - has a parallel with Trimalchio's. Note too Gower's comment (1993,46) that the 'hybrid dishes' in the *Cena* remind us that 'the book itself is a bogus pastiche, as well as the society it depicts.'

I have already mentioned the 'drive to perform in public' at that time (Rudich, 1997,239); and he avers that from that perspective the *Cena* is little more than 'a series of performances' by Trimalchio, his slaves and his guests. Rudich suggests, probably rightly, that the performance, and the *dissimulatio*, reflected life in general in Rome at that time, when one did not make untimely remarks, particularly about the ruling power. The *Cena* may indeed contain some oblique references to Nero, so to that extent there is caution and *dissimulatio*. However, the characters in that episode seem all too keen to perform in public, and are not reticent about their feelings: Seleucus (42), Phileros (43), Ganymede (44) and Echion (45) all put on a turn; though their complaints about government are generally aimed at the local variety. Much other comment is about day to day life. The overlying structure may be one of theatre, but the characters therein by and large are being themselves, and perhaps for that very reason being a target for Petronius.

That is not to say, however, that they are not reflections of characters to be found elsewhere in literature. As Walsh remarks (1970,139): 'Trimalchio is thus at once not only the recognisable heir to

Theophrastus' boor, Philodemus' arrogant master, and Horace's vulgar host,' but also representative of a type found often enough in Neronian social life, and detested by those with a pretence to breeding and social accomplishment. That is largely true. Trimalchio does indeed incorporate the features mentioned; it is the fact that they are all rolled into one person that make him the monster that he is. Indeed, if Trimalchio is to be compared to Nero, it is in that factor; and the fact that the narrator and his friends had to use *dissimulatio* to keep on the right side of him - if only to get another invitation to dinner! - may well reflect such a situation in contemporary life at court. Perhaps Trimalchio's mood swings - maudlin, aggressive, cheerful, morbid, boastful - can be seen as a reflection of Nero's behaviour, which seems to have swung erratically as his reign progressed (Suetonius, *Nero*, 9, 23, 29, 30); whether such behaviour was natural or assumed is difficult to say.

Beacham (1999,199) suggests too, that although Nero's dinners were at first moderate (Dio Cassius, LXI,4,3), eventually they did bear comparison to what is depicted in the *Cena*. Perhaps Nero too manipulated his guests in the same way that Trimalchio did his. There is indeed a hint of that in Dio LXI,4,5, where Nero's companions vie for his favour; and in 5,2 Nero in turn angles for the favour of the crowd. I think it possible that such could be applied to some of the behaviour of Trimalchio and his guests.

In connection with Theophrastus, I quote from the Loeb edition (34) the list of the features of his *Characters* in alphabetical order; the first dozen are: Arrogance, Backbiting, Boorishness, Buffoonery, Cowardice, Dissembling, Distrustfulness, Flattery, Friendship with rascals, Garrulity, Ill-breeding and Loquacity: all characteristics that feature among Trimalchio and his guests. Indeed, of the thirty *Characters*, twenty five are featured in some way or another among the characters of the *Satyricon*. While I do not think that Petronius was deliberately drawing on Theophrastus' work - though it might be an instructive investigation for someone to undertake - it does show that, like Theophrastus, Petronius was a keen observer of life; and a skilful portrayer of the characters he observed therein.

It may also be the case that, if we had the whole work, the characters therein would cover Theophrastus' whole range, and many more besides. With possibly hundreds of characters, major and minor, it may be that the *Satyricon* relied more on Petronius' portrayal of character than on the actual plot for its attraction. Apart from the lesser characters and the three 'heroes', the extant portion has two major ones at which Petronius pokes considerable fun: the vulgar freedman Trimalchio, and the bombastic versifier Eumolpus: both pretenders or impostors who seem to have no trouble in duping the 'heroes'. Perhaps Petronius is poking fun at both the dupers and the all too easily duped. One must also

speculate whether each section or episode of the work as a whole contained such a major character as a prime target for criticism from Petronius and from society as a whole.

Fantham has written (1988,55) that Cicero (*de Orat.*, II,251) listed as the butts of mime 'the Bad tempered Man, the Superstitious Fellow, the Suspicious Man, the Boaster and the Fool - all types familiar from Menandrian comedy.' Thus the mime was continuing a long tradition of characterisation, based both on the theatre and other literature. The theatrical effect in Petronius depends on how he manages to fit the characters into the overall framework, and how they interact with one another. The comic effect is dependent on the characters themselves and their various interactions.

That point is made to some extent by Auerbach in his perceptive essay on Trimalchio (1953,31): 'The banquet is purely a comic work. The individual characters, as well as the connecting narrative are kept at the lowest level of style, both in diction and treatment. And this suggests that everything problematic, everything psychologically or socially suggestive of serious, let alone tragic, complications must be excluded, for its excessive weight might break the style.' While it may be true that the whole effect is a comic one, it is perhaps too much to say that everything serious was omitted. As noted above, Rudich (1997) saw some underlying serious comment on society and politics of the day; and other commentators have made similar observations. Perhaps the

ordinary 'innocent' reader could simply let all that go and enjoy the comic, theatrical effect, as Auerbach implies.

Bartsch (1994,198) notes that Trimalchio's staging of his *Cena* gets much of its point and entertainment value 'from the carefully orchestrated tendency of its dramatic presentation to turn into real events, developments that the bemused spectator Encolpius fails to understand:' e.g. 41,6-8; 59,7; 78,5. I agree that there are occasions in the *Cena* when the theatrical seems to become the real; as occasionally happens in life itself.

As to Petronius' audience's possible feelings during the reading of the *Cena* episode: Conte (1996,130) remarks that Petronius has not allowed Encolpius and his companions to be like Horace's Fundanius, Varius and Viscus. 'He has made them feeble, enclosed in their pretentious but ineffectual scholasticism:' the victims of the overwhelming vulgarity of Trimalchio's world. Their final flight was an admission of defeat, not of defiance. That may be true, but while the episode lasted, the trio seem to have been willing tc pander to their host, and to be looking for a return invitation. Only at the last, when it all became unbearable, did they seize the chance to get out, in 78, when Trimalchio started to make arrangements for his funeral: *res ibat ad summam nauseam*. Perhaps the three, although they had their problems, felt that it was far too soon for them to be thinking about death, and that they should move on.

The reader of course could sit as a spectator watching the whole scene performed as on a stage, and, if so inclined, feel rather smug that he was not like one of the vulgar upstarts that were Trimalchio and his retinue - he would never talk like them for a start - or the feckless self-interested vagabonds that were the three 'heroes' - he was much more decisive and virile. It is of course one of the aims of theatre that the audience should feel sympathy with or antipathy towards the characters portrayed; and Panayotakis sums up the whole situation (1995,109), when he says that the element of theatricality in the *Cena* can be shown in the spectacular appearance of the host and his household, the eccentric use of games, music, and food, and in the farcical spectacles from the popular mimes.

Sandy (1974,338) raises an interesting point when he notes the possibility of 'staged, mimic *convivia*' (Jerome, *Epistles*, LII,8,6). The sarcastic references to various types of philosophers in Laberius' mimes may indicate that 'other kinds of weighty intellectual matters were treated for laughs on the mimic stage;' possibly in the manner of Trimalchio's discourse in 56,1-7, in which he threatens to put philosophers out of business. It would indeed be interesting if the above could be proved; in any case it does not detract from Sandy's claim (331) that 'The host's stage managing is strongly felt in the structure of the *Cena*.' Note also Beacham's remarks, considered above, on such matters (1999,198-199). Observe too the visual

variety, 'its theatricality', noted by C. Jones, who lists the various instances of that (1991, 185-198).

Panayotakis (109) is right to say that the scope of theatricality in the *Cena* is different from that of the rest of the extant work. There seems to be less of the coarse mimic side, and more of other theatrical and general entertainment modes, as I noted above. There is perhaps more of the general scope and ambience of the theatre: the crowd, the bustle, the range of interesting characters, the varied entertainments. It is more than just a mime, it is a complete theatrical experience, a complete entertainment: a *spectaculum*.

In conclusion, there is much of mime in the *Cena*, but also much from other entertainment. There are certainly differences from the rest of the work, but also many similarities. That does go to show that the *Satyricon* was not just a long series of similar episodes involving the three 'heroes', with only the most tenuous links between the episodes. In the *Cena* they play very much second fiddle to Trimalchio and the other guests. The author was wanting his audience to have a laugh at the expense of vulgar upstart freedmen like Trimalchio, while also probably, along with other Romans, making a protest at the power that they held - or rather perhaps at the way in which they used or abused it; or at their general demeanour and behaviour. Petronius was perhaps trying to get an audience on his side by making them laugh at a common foe, instead of merely attracting them by the

coarse devices of the mime as elsewhere. Given that we have only a fraction of the work and that parts of the surviving sections are themselves fragmentary, it is difficult to place the *Cena* in the context of the work as a whole. It is different, yet it is the same. It is indeed a *spectaculum*, and would thus attract an audience as Petronius may have intended, but is possibly only one in a series, some different, some possibly similar.

In any case it would seem that the sector of the entertainment system that Petronius made most use of in his work was the theatre, particularly the mime: a very suitable framework on which to hang a tale of feckless, vagabond fellows, who get into a series of disreputable scrapes. Since the mime, and indeed other forms of entertainment, pulled out all the stops to attract spectators, so did Petronius. Perhaps in the context of his times he might seem more of an opportunist than a sensationalist; yet his style and wit made him much more than just either or both of those. He was an artist who knew his public, and catered for it. His 'public' may indeed have been difficult to define, and its wants equally so at times - beyond that for entertainment. However, the indications are that Petronius fulfilled a need; which may help in forming conclusions about his work.

8. CONCLUSIONS

a) The Problems

Panayotakis (1995,196) perhaps best sums up the problems that have to be faced with the *Satyricon*. I agree with him that it is not an easy text to understand, an attribute exacerbated by the fragmentary state of work, which 'produces more speculations .... than conclusions based on facts.' A sensible, scholarly approach would take into account the literary attributes of the popular theatre and apply them to the *Satyricon*. That could claim to be 'much closer to the author's artistic intentions than the imaginative interpretations which seek ....to identify this text with more than it actually is: a sophisticated, scabrous book.' Thus Panayotakis fits the work into the mime framework. I accept that that may be true of Petronius' artistic intentions in many respects, again provided it is not pushed too far, and leaves room for other popular interests, both on the stage and off. I would again stress that, if the *Satyricon* was indeed a very long work, such a mimic framework might eventually fall flat - both in its literary structure and in its appeal to the audience - unless its base were wider. Moreover, one must consider not only the author's artistic intentions; his publishing intentions must also be taken into account, and these are even more difficult to establish.

Witke (1970,154) makes some valuable points. The Neronian age itself offers a reason why no explicit stand

was taken in the work. Such a stand would have been regarded as tasteless. 'The Neronian audience complements the work's lack of explicit morality. In Petronius' picture of an overly refined world, which is often vulgar and insipid, room is left for an audience to make its own inferences and supply its own norms.' From what I have already written, it must be clear that I would generally concur with that view, and with Witke's elaboration of it (155): 'Petronius shifts one of satire's chief activities, the direction of moral insight, from the text to the audience.... His audience reacts according to whether it is rich or poor, high or low born, wanton or not, an enthusiast for exotic cult, or more conservative in religious habit. Petronius offers something for everyone without presenting something for all to share in common.' I would further assert that 'everyone' means just that: everyone who became acquainted with Petronius' work, and has become acqainted with it since. For a modern audience too is free 'to make its own inferences and supply its own norms.' It is, however, an overinsistence in doing just that which has led some commentators astray. I also think that Petronius meant it to be the case that everyone should find something in the *Satyricon* for himself or herself. However, I would stress that Petronius did present two things 'for all to share in common': enjoyment and entertainment. While that did not preclude his addressing a particular 'narrow' audience, it might point to his aiming at a wider one.

Apart from the poems in the extant portion of the *Satyricon*, a number of other poems have been attributed, in some cases doubtfully, to Petronius. These deal with various themes, including love; and there is little of protest, apart from an attack on conventional religion (fragment XXVII in the *Penguin* translation, 1986); or sensationalism, apart from a jibe at the Jews in LI, and a brief poem (XXXIX) which recalls Trimalchio's concern for his inner workings (47,2). Perry (1967,201) makes the point that the poems in the *Anthology* may have been quoted from the lost parts of the *Satyricon*; in which case the choice may have been influenced by the selector's inclinations. They are pleasant poems, with no apparent attempt to attract a wider audience; and the *Satyricon* does stand out in contrast with them.

As to Petronius being a sensationalist, I have noted that much of his work would be considered sensational within my definition of the term. However, Powell (1992,211) mentions the influential modern critic Hans-Robert Jauss whose 'central notion is that of the "horizon of expectations", defined as the set of cultural, ethical and literary .... expectations of a work's readers at the historical moment of its appearance.' The 'horizon of expectations' of many of Petronius' potential audience or readership was entertainment, at a 'historical moment' when entertainment in general involved the cruel, the spectacular, the coarse, the bizarre. Petronius' extant work reflects much of such a compass, as does that of two

of his near contemporaries. [*15]

It should be borne in mind, however, that his readers may not have regarded his work as being sensational. Their 'horizon of expectations' may well have been different from that of modern readers; just as ours may be different from that of readers of a century ago. Indeed Powell (207) warns us that a modern interpretation of an ancient text is almost inevitably influenced by the 'modern cultural context' in which it is made. Thus, while Petronius may appear more a sensationalist than a protester, one must beware of branding Petronius a sensationalist, even if he is trying to attract a readership by reflecting their interests in what moderns might call sensational entertainment; but which at that time was merely part of everyday life.

Indeed it may be that the Romans were not as concerned about the quantity of the entertainment provided as about its quality. For instance Echion in 45 is delighted with the promoter Titus who 'will give you the finest blades, no running away, butchery in the middle, where the whole audience can see it:' in contrast to Norbanus who 'produced some decayed twopenny-halfpenny gladiators, who would have fallen flat if you breathed on them.' Whether or not the Romans regarded the entertainment in the arena as sensational, it was obviously an important part of life for very many of them; a factor which Petronius would have to take into account.

Likewise the mime seems to have been accepted as part

of everyday entertainment. Eumolpus' fantastic proposal in 117 draws no protest from the others, who simply go along with it. Petronius seems to have felt comfortable in bringing in the fantastic, the sexual and the varied entertainment of the mime, without feeling that he would alienate his audience. The *Catones* of 132,15 might have something to say about it, just as Seneca had about certain displays in the arena, but Petronius seems to have felt on safe ground in including such matters. Perhaps he felt that he had to in order to retain the majority of his audience.

b) Partial Solutions

Obviously then there can be many interpretations of the aims of the *Satyricon*, and of the methods employed by Petronius. While that I feel that none of them can be universally applied to the work, it is not enough simply to leave it at that.

Zeitlin (1971 [2],631-686) takes an approach to the *Satyricon* that accepts 'its paradoxes, its inconsistencies, its incongruities as integral emblems of a world view that expresses a consistent vision of disintegration' (633). She goes on to claim that the picaresque 'never really resolves the chaotic appearance of the world.... Ancient testimonia, which presumably refer to *the work as a whole* [my emphasis], do not give the impression that a radically impicaresque ending made any restoration of harmony' (652). In the picaresque, 'Episode follows episode without true causal connection.... Anything can and does happen.... The *Satyricon* displays these same features in its variety of episodes.' She adds, however, that, within the loose confines of a long fictional narrative, 'Petronius has succeeded in creating an internal coherence and logic' (684). I agree that one has to take an approach to the *Satyricon* that accepts the various factors mentioned as integral parts of the work, and that we must try to be consistent in that. There is indeed much in the events described in the *Satyricon* that seems to be shaky, if not disintegrating: as in the final scenes in the *Cena*

(71-78) and the turmoil which follows (79-82). There was also much in the lives of Petronius and his contemporaries that must have seemed shifting and impermanent, and indeed downright dangerous: as in the voyage and shipwreck (99-115). The episodes in the *Satyricon* do at times seem disjointed without any real connection between them except the three main characters. This may be due to the method of composition or be a general feature of an episodic work. The situation is not helped by the work being lacuna ridden and far from complete. Even so, Petronius seems to have imposed some 'internal coherence and logic' on the chaotic world of Encolpius and his friends; and this may have helped reconcile him to the chaotic or dangerous real world.

Also, however loose the construction of the work may seem, one still gets the feeling that Petronius is in charge; and, however much the world of Encolpius and his friends may appear shaky, they are not going to be destroyed by it - they did escape from Trimalchio, they did survive the shipwreck. One gets the feeling that they are always going to escape to fight another day. That too may reflect life in contemporary Rome where many, both rich and poor were living from day to day, whether for financial, political or other reasons. Yet the great majority survived despite their problems.

Zeitlin does indeed concede that within the loose confines of his long narrative the author has managed to create an inner coherence. 'Form, style and content are

all integrated into a world view, which may dismay us by its vision of anarchy, but which we may admire paradoxically for the integrity of its presentation in Petronius' art' (684). That is true, as long as one does not push the view that Petronius' sole purpose was to point out and emphasise the instability of life in his day. His audience would be aware enough of that anyway. In my view Petronius may indeed be providing an antidote to that by introducing characters who are somehow able to take advantage of these instabilities. After all they got a good meal and a lot of entertainment out of Trimalchio, and entertaining adventures out of Eumolpus; and despite the problems for Encolpius the sexual episodes are entertaining, for the audience at least. Moreover, it is all bound up in a framework of the entertainment industry of the day and its influences. Human life may have been fleeting, as in the arena, but humanity somehow manages to win through.

There has been much comment on the uniqueness of the *Satyricon*. Sullivan (1968 [1],81) claims that what Petronius produced was a highly original work, 'comparable only to such individually unique productions as *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*.' While the two later novels had facets in common with the *Satyricon*, e.g. obscenity, it is true that each had a certain isolation about it. The later two both had a considerable effect on the critics and moralists of their day; the latter seemed to make the most noise. Whether the *Satyricon* had the same impact in

its day is impossible to say with any certainty, but perhaps Petronius' use of the various entertainment attractions of the time did catch the attention of a public weaned on such.

Smith (1975,xi) remarks: 'There is no evidence of the reception of the *Satyricon* by those who first read it.' However, the work, especially the *Cena*, does illustrate 'Petronius' versatility, his wide range of humour, his subtle characterisation, his skilful interweaving of traditional literary motifs and techniques and his unerring appreciation of the mentality of common people and their speech.' I agree that Petronius does display such a wide variety and scope of talents, and uses them to hold together a story that otherwise could well have got out of hand or disintegrated. I think that it may well be that wide range which has led commentators to seek such a variety of aims and purposes for the *Satyricon*. Again I must stress my belief that, while the various theories can individually encompass certain of the episodes and techniques *in the extant part of the work*, they cannot individually encompass them all. I suspect that none of them can be completely correct, nor, possibly, is each one completely wrong. For, as Perry (1967,186) pessimistically remarks: 'The problem of what its purpose was, ... while fascinating, has proved to be one of the most baffling problems of literary history, and no-one has yet offered a solution which seems to be entirely satisfactory, or acceptable to more than a minority of

critics.' While I feel that that is a little too pessimistic - there have been some positive advances in Petronian scholarship since Perry wrote - one has to face the fact that one cannot please everybody in this matter. Perhaps if we had some better idea of Petronius' hoped for audience, there would be less dissension over his aims.

What seems to gain unanimous agreement is the work's close connection with public entertainment, especially the mime. I have already cautioned against making overmuch of that; but the fact that the shows set out simply to entertain - any preaching, teaching or informing was very much secondary - may suggest that Petronius was trying to do likewise. This should be connected with my assertion that Petronius was trying to sustain his readers' interest in his work by continually attracting their attention through their everyday concerns and pursuits. In other words he is seeking to entertain rather than inform or preach. There was indeed a risk that people would become bored by that, but they still seemed to patronise the shows as eagerly as ever. Petronius' entertainment had to match that of the shows, and thus his work had to be sensational; hence my inclination to regard him as a sensationalist rather than a protester. As a protester he had to be careful about his targets, as a sensationalist he could let his abilities run free; for the sake of entertainment. Moreover it is this factor which suggests that the work may have been aimed at more than just a restricted literary circle. Whether it ever broke out

from that circle can probably never be known.

I rather agree with Coffey when he remarks that, while Petronius was actively involved in the decadence of his time, he could still view it with detached and amused contempt. For instance, he does not harp on about the effects of 'freedman power', he merely pokes fun at it. More tellingly, Coffey adds that Petronius 'offers much for the delight and entertainment of his readers. Above all he was a great story teller, and in the words of Dryden, "the greatest wit perhaps of all the Romans"' (1976,203). Hence I am convinced that the work could be enjoyed by more than a small literary circle. People could have simply enjoyed the story, and ignored any real or alleged literary or personal allusions, if the former were all that they were willing, or able, to do. The satire and social comment were on offer, but they did not have to buy them. After all many modern readers, with different cultural, intellectual or literary backgrounds from Petronius' Roman contemporaries, still manage to appreciate and enjoy the work. *We* perhaps are the wider circle at which Petronius may have been aiming; unwittingly of course, but that may help explain his continued popularity. Succeeding ages can all find something for themselves in the *Satyricon*. They do not have to be members of a small coterie in ancient Rome, acquainted with the works of every author from Homer to Lucan.

After all, as I have noted, many of Petronius' targets

are 'universal' ones. The sexual or seamier side of life has always attracted authors and outraged their critics. The story built up of a series of semi-independent episodes has had many imitators, some very successful: e.g. *Tom Jones, Tristram Shandy, The Pickwick Papers*; likewise stories dealing with 'all human life'. Of course the *Satyricon* has much that is *sui generis*, but there is much that has an enduring and universal appeal to a readership of varying education, culture and attitude.

In this respect one should also note Conte's remarks on Petronius' realism as 'the capacity to transpose into the text different symbolic systems and different spheres and experiences of life, and to do so with an empathy that excludes both sympathy and the aggressivity of satire' (1996,177). It seems to me that such applies to Petronius' 'heroes'. One may not feel a lot of sympathy for Encolpius and company, yet they are presented in such a way that hostility towards them is not provoked either. They are ridiculous without being despicable. That is reinforced by Conte's further observation (178): 'While the author allows himself the privilege of detachment and irony, he assumes a position of objectivity; he leaves subjectivity .... to his narrator Encolpius;' and, I would posit most firmly, to *us*. Petronius' handling of the characters and incidents of his work leaves readers to make up their own minds about them, whatever these readers' time, location, culture or education.

I am well aware that all of the above could lead into

the trap of trying 'to identify this text with more than it actually is', and of pursuing one's ideas further than they can reasonably be sustained. That may be inevitable given the text's fragmentary nature, which allows theories generally to have only a limited application. All I can say is that Petronius' work is entertaining; much of it involved a framework from the entertainment industry; his audience would wish to be entertained. Surely he was an entertainer above all.

9. ENDNOTES

*1 (Page 13)

Conte (1996,34) notes that the *Satyricon* seems to parody the Greek novel, but cautions that this appears through the work like 'a barely perceptible shadow of meaning.... The game of parody is conducted with great delicacy, implicitly rather than by open expression. Petronius is master of the art of evoking stereotypes by exploiting their sheer banality.' This would tie in with the view that it was not particular authors that Patronius was satirising, but particular genres with their stereotyped exponents. That would also tie in with N. Slater's view on parody. Conte also seems to side with Slater when he says that the work 'is in itself a narrative to read and follow in its own peculiar and complex anatomy of reading.' Thus two of the more influential modern commentators agree that extracting meaning and effect from the work depends greatly on the reader.

In this connection note that Conte's 'hidden author' is in effect Petronius speaking through Encolpius. He is not implying that Petronius personally resembled Encolpius, but that the latter voiced certain of Petronius' views on life. One certainly cannot totally discount this, as some commentators have, but full justification would require the finding of the majority of the work.

Conte seems to agree with Panayotakis and others in

saying that the *Satyricon* cannot be turned into ' a collection of individual satiric pieces, that would treat the most disparate arguments enclosed in narrative framework' (161). There is no sign of that in any extant collection of satires. He notes (162) that if a real structural constant is looked for in the work, it is easy 'to recognize a continuous action constructed of narrative elements from the novel.' That may be true; but the *Satyricon's* plot has a wide scope. It includes the factors that Conte mentions, but they need not necessarily have been copied from the novel; they could simply have come from everyday life, common gossip, folklore or whatever. I would therefore caution that Petronius may have done that on occasion, rather than quarried in the Greek novel, or the mime.

*2 (Page 15)

One must point out that Rudich's early years were spent in Soviet Russia at a time when one suspects that *dissimulatio* in public life and in literature was almost a necessary attribute. That perhaps has made him conscious of *dissimulatio* in other ages and cultures. Whether that has led him to overstress the *dissimulatio* in Nero's time is difficult to say. He himself does note that the general population probably had few problems with Nero. The real question is whether Petronius felt the need to introduce the *dissimulatio* necessary in his social and political life into his writings; or whether such a work

as the *Satyricon* and its characters was going to encompass *dissimulatio* in speech and action in any case. Whether one agrees with what Rudich writes, his views certainly give different slants on the problems, as compared with those of most other commentators, who are Western European or American in origin.

*3 (Page 29 upper)

In over twenty years of writing on the *Satyricon*, Sullivan's views remained quite consistent; as in 1968 [1],83: 'If the evidence is valid, we may say that the *Satyricon* was written for recitation to Nero's highly literate court circle;' and 1985 [2],161-176, where he also makes much of the reference/parody between the *Satyricon* and the works of Seneca and Lucan. The latter is also emphasised in most of the items under his name in the Bibliography.

While I feel that his stance on the above matters would require at least some modification, I would accept his point in 1968 [1],90 that '*Satura* is a flexible form in Roman literature and may deal with .... subjects which our own narrower definition would not regard as satire at all.' I too feel that the scope of Petronius' work transcends the 'normal' bounds of satire, just as it does with regard to those of mime and novel. Sullivan is right therefore in his view (81) that Petronius produced 'a highly original work'. It is perhaps this 'originality' of the *Satyricon*, along with its scope, that has helped

cause such problems for commentators.

*4 (Page 29 lower)

Translations of the *Satyricon* sometimes have added to them a translation of the *Apocolocyntosis*. This work has normally been attributed to Seneca the Younger, though doubts have been expressed. The views of Currie (1962,91-97) are now generally accepted. He also notes that the *Apocolocyntosis*, like the *Satyricon*, was written in the Menippean tradition (95), and that the purpose of the work was Seneca getting his own back on Claudius. However, Currie goes further: 'The humour, though brutal in many places, would, while speaking to the condition of courtiers (whose sensibility differed from ours), bring down the desired ridicule and contempt on Claudius as a man and emperor, and also reinforce in Nero's mind the lessons conveyed by the serious parts.' The coarse jesting was both to play to the gallery and to show to Nero by contrast how a wise prince should behave. Currie is right to point out that the sensibilities of Seneca's possible audience 'differed from ours'. Those of Petronius' audience probably did as well. One must keep that in mind when viewing the humour and intentions of the two works.

The *Apocolocyntosis* too is satiric in nature, and is a medley of verse and prose, with the latter predominating. There is a series of declamations from the gods, just as there are from men in the *Cena*. There are a few examples

of the scabrous (as at the end of 4) and the violent (15) in Seneca's work, but they are all part of the fun, as they are in Petronius. Courtney (1962,86) observes that Petronius derived his themes from, and made parodies of a great range of diverse works. 'His exuberant genius .... completely overrides the formal canons of ancient literary theory; hence the Menippean form, which by its very nature promotes this.'

I am not suggesting for a moment that the *Apocolocyntosis* was deliberately reflected in the *Satyricon*, but Petronius may well have read it, and felt happy in continuing its cheerful, irreverent tone.

*5 (Page 67 upper)

Walsh, like other commentators, regards the *Satyricon* as a wide ranging mixture 'of Greek fiction with Roman satire and mimic motifs' (1970,7). To that he allies the valuable point that comic writers aim at pleasure at two levels, 'a combination of sensational content and a sophisticated literary texture' (3).

It is presumably these last three words which cause him to side with Sullivan in claiming that the *Satyricon* was written as 'sophisticated entertainment for the literary public' (32). Likewise these words involve Walsh in general agreement with Sullivan over the references to Seneca and Lucan.

However, Walsh should perhaps be better noted for his views expressed in 'Was Petronius a Moralist?' (1974).

There he discounts the views of Highet, Arrowsmith and others that Petronius was consciously describing and berating a corrupt society (183-187). There he again underscores the 'two level' nature and the scope of the work (186); with 'evocations of numerous genres .... constantly providing a second, more intellectual level of entertainment beyond the narrative of low, lubricious adventure.'

*6 (Page 67 lower)

F. Jones too (2001,26) notes that Petronius and Juvenal appear to have been affected by 'the element of play acting that seems to have become endemic in imperial society'. This is particularly so in the *Satyricon* 'which obviously represents a fictitious world, but is worth citing as a reflection of the tastes and interests of the period.' I have already noted that play acting - a kind of *dissimulatio* - did indeed seem to influence life in Neronian Rome; perhaps play writing was a form of extension of that. Note too Courtney's remark (2001,218) that it is difficult to forget that 'Petronius lived within a circle of a stage-struck emperor, and that the sober record of events of the time often reads more like a drama or declamation than reality.'

*7 (Page 73)

N. Slater is much concerned about the effect that the *Satyricon* may have had on its possible readers. He puts

forward his views in Chapter I of his 1990 work, which contains a good overview of the problems facing Petronian scholarship, and the state it had reached in 1990. In it he makes a valuable point about parody (18): 'The *Satyricon* parodies 'an astonishingly wide range of other literature. Parody is a style rather than a genre, parasitic upon other literary or cultural forms.' He urges readers to forget previous experiences of the work, and indeed the controversies about it.

Slater then goes through the work noting the various factors which may have influenced Petronius in his writing and his readers in their reading and interpretation of it. He finds (250): 'Other texts are multiply interpretable; this text is singularly uninterpretable.... [251] In drawing Petronius into contemporary debates about meaning and interpretation, ... I have risked sacrificing part of the meaning, the power to make us laugh.' Thus through his consideration of the endless debates on Petronius and his work, Slater, like Conte, has kept his feet on the ground. He accepts that in the end the interpretation is up to the individual reader, whatever his or her educational, cultural or social background.

*8 (Page 115)

Conte (1996,13) remarks that 'the rhetoric of excess contains the risk of its own collapse,' and that might well apply in these instances. He notes that Longinus takes a similar line. He points to *On the Sublime*, 15,8

where 'mad' scenes please declaimers 'who abandon themselves like a persecuted Orestes to visions of Furies and do not understand that Orestes himself has the right to displays of frenzy, because he is truly mad.'

Further points need to be made about the Lichas 'funeral oration' (115). If Petronius simply wanted to get rid of Lichas, he could easily have had him blown overboard and that would have been the end of the matter. To have his body recovered and his old foe Encolpius deliver a speech over it suggests that Petronius was trying to put something over: Perhaps it was to show the risk of 'the rhetoric of excess' leading to its own collapse: 'Where is your temper and your hot head now? .... Let mortal men go and fill their hearts with proud imaginings .... Lord, Lord, how far he lies from his consummation! .... Make a fair reckoning and you find shipwreck everywhere;' and so on in similar vein. Possibly Petronius was trying to show that Encolpius was as good at futile rhetoric as anyone else, for instance Eumolpus. Perhaps also he was making the point that, since there was now little opportunity for speeches in the limited political or social spheres, all that was left was for 'show' speeches, such as funeral orations. One must also consider again whether this is the real 'persona' of Petronius: the capable orator who is reduced to making 'show' speeches, because it would be unsafe for him to make political ones; just as he may have been a capable 'serious' author who had to write farce in order to divert

suspicion from himself.

*9 (Page 125)

Seneca indeed had a precedent to draw on. Galinsky (1975,136) points out that Ovid's account of Perseus' battle, like that of the Lapiths and Centaurs, and the killing of Pelias by his daughters, presents 'in the most sadistic and grotesque manner the butchery of a helpless, old man at the altar (*Metamorphoses*, V,103-106):

'His old hands
Cling to the altars, and Chromis struck him there,
Beheading him, and the head fell on the altar,
Still upright, and the tongue kept up its cursing,
Thickened and stilled, and the breath failed over the fires.'

*10 (Page 151)

Harris suggests that at best 15% of the population of Rome and Italy were literate (1989,259); though some might put the figure higher. Some may have had reading skills only for a particular limited purpose, like Echion in 46,7. Even so, 'Authors were numerous and prolific; it may seem that only the exceptionally inarticulate members of the Roman upper class refrained from literary composition' (222): a feature, or menace, which was possibly one of Petronius' targets. Certainly writers like Suetonius and Plutarch are noted as having a very copious output.

*11 (Page 157)

Stephens (1994,409) reinforces her points, but with reservations: the small size of the ancient population of readers would not necessarily preclude ancient novels from being a source of popular entertainment, as they could be read to those who themselves could not read. 'But were they? Ancient sources attest to many kinds of public performance.... But nothing is said of novel readings, and even the shortest of surviving novels are too long for convenient public recitation.' She concedes that excerpts may have been read, but wonders whether that would have popularised the novel. It is a legitimate question, but it should be noted that shortened, excerpted or simplified versions of more recent novelists' works have long been available and apparently popular. It is likely that at least some of their readers have gone on to read the 'real thing'. It may of course be pure accident that we do not hear of public readings of novels. Anyway, need the reading have been a public one? Private ones may have been at least partly effective.

*12 (Page 168)

One should perhaps note that Trimalchio's arrangements for after his death (71ff.) were a prelude to the end of 'his' episode in the work. Were Eumolpus' arrangements for his death (if he is speaking in 141) also a prelude to his departure from the scene? Possibly such scenes were also found in mime, which may explain their appearance in

the *Satyricon*.

*13 (Page 173)

This episode also reflects the menace of legacy hunters at the time, and Petronius could be using this to protest at them; and in doing so getting at least some of his audience on his side. So this could be yet another example of Petronius protesting at one of the common contemporary targets, while integrating that into a humorous situation.

*14 (Page 175)

Panayotakis' work is largely concerned with the influence of the mime in the *Satyricon*. One must, however, bear in mind his attempts to define the mime (1995,xiii). He notes that the fourth century AD grammarian Diomedes defined it as 'an imitation of any kind of speech and irreverent movement, or the lascivious imitation of shameful deeds and words; it is thus defined by the Greeks; "mime is imitation of life containing both licit and illicit subjects".' Panayotakis feels that Diomedes' definition is not a successful one, as it rather limits mime to imitating words or deeds that the grammarian found obscene. That, I feel, may also be a pointer to why writers made no mention of the *Satyricon* for so long. Panayotakis points out that other factors in mime, such as song, dance, religious connotations, are not embraced in Diomedes' definition. He feels it important

to remember, from the Greek citation, that it is 'all aspects of everyday life, and not heroic or divine subjects,' that a mime imitates.

Therefore I think one can agree largely with Panayotakis' work on the mime in Petronius' novel, as long as his own observations are borne in mind. I would also repeat my assertion that, as the *Satyricon* embraces so many 'aspects of everyday life', it may have done so without using the mime as an intermediary.

*15 (page 193)

Jauss (1982,19) delineates further: 'The perception of the aesthetics of reception mediates between passive reception and active understanding.' This, I feel, to be true, in varying degrees, of every audience, past or present. Also probably true is Jauss's further remark (23): 'A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implied allusions.' The *Satyricon* may indeed have appeared new to its original audience, and to its other audiences since. Each may have given it a different type of 'reception' and been influenced differently by various 'announcements' etc; but Jauss's assertion still remains basically true.

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Note the following abbreviation:
A.N.R.W. = Aufstieg und Niedergang der roemischen Welt

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